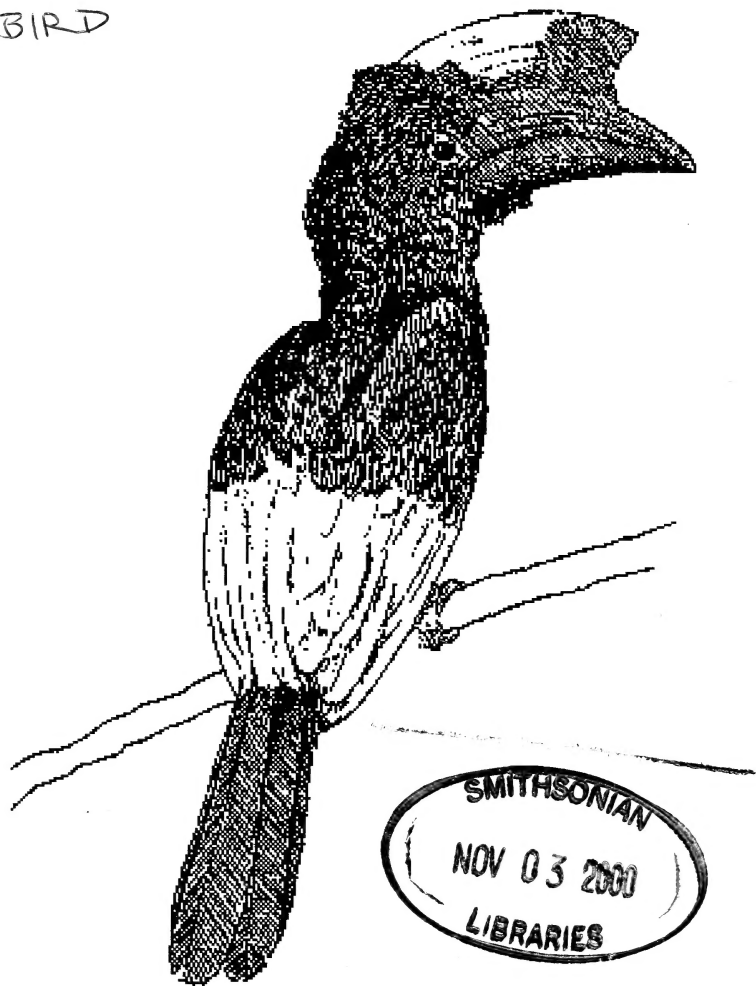


Kenya Birds

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Editorial

Kenya Birds is eight years old. Up until now it has been read by a relatively limited circle: birdwatchers (of all levels of interest and experience) in Kenya and a few abroad. Last year, the Bird Committee decided that *Kenya Birds* should, from vol. 8, be distributed to all members of Nature Kenya. We warmly welcome all our new readers and hope that you will find something to interest you in this and future issues, whether or not you have a personal enthusiasm for birds. *Kenya Birds'* content has not changed — this remains a magazine about birds, birdwatching and bird conservation. However, we are always happy to receive suggestions on what you would (and would not) like to see published. We are also happy that *Kenya Birds* should evolve to suit better its new, broader readership. If you can accompany your suggestions with some material for publication, then even better (see the 'notes for contributors' at the back of this issue).

We have already taken the opportunity, in this issue, to make some small changes in style and format. The layout of *Kenya Birds* has always been very simple, the emphasis being on content and clarity rather than fancy design. This hasn't changed, but a few features have been dusted off and modernised. We hope you find these changes improve appearance and readability — but once again, feedback is very welcome.

The last eight years have seen many advances in our understanding of Kenya's birds. However, the more we find out the more new puzzles seem to emerge. Also, it becomes more and more obvious that many of our birds face very serious and urgent conservation problems. If there is any hope that we can do something about these problems, it is be-

cause of the enormous upsurge in interest in birds (and the wider environment) over that same eight years. We hope that *Kenya Birds* has played some small part in encouraging this interest: we need your support to keep on doing so. It is a cliché, but true nevertheless, that the young birdwatchers of today will determine whether our birds (and other biodiversity) have a tomorrow.

This issue includes news up to July 2000. The records date from around August 1998 to the time of World Birdwatch in October 1999, plus a few particularly interesting older observations. World Birdwatch produced a huge number of exciting records, and these are taking a long time to process — the delay being made worse by our records officer in the Ornithology Department going on study leave. We intend to bring records as far as possible up to date in the next *Kenya Birds*. That issue will also have an update on new species for the Kenya list, and revisions to the list of Red Data book species (as BirdLife International publishes 'Birds to Watch 3').

Before signing off, we would like to say 'thanks' to Mark Mallalieu for editorial help, and to Duncan Butchart for allowing us to reproduce his superb line drawings from the 'Ecological Journal' nos. 1 and 2. These publications, by the Conservation Corporation, Africa, also include many interesting natural history notes: we hope to publish some of the bird material for a wider audience in future *Kenya Birds*.

In the meantime — good birding!

Leon Bennun and Colin Jackson

Birding in... Koru

Neil Willsher

c/o Homa Lime Co., Private Bag, Koru

Where is Koru? A good question, and for most people a difficult one to answer. Koru is situated close to Muhoroni Town in the sugar belt on the edge of Mt Tinderet, at the entrance to the Nyando Valley. It lies on the boundary of Nyanza and Rift Valley Provinces. It is an excellent place to bird and ideal for people wanting to visit the wetlands of Ahero, Lake Victoria, and the South Nandi, Mau or Kakamega Forests, all of which are within an easy drive.

Homa Lime Co. owns land in Koru and this farm is a perfect base for birding. The altitude of the area ranges from 1400–1700 m and the climate is fairly hot and humid with annual rainfall averaging around 1600 mm. Over 250 species have been recorded to date and the scenery is stunning. Getting around is very easy on an excellent network of well-graded farm tracks and footpaths.

The birdlife in the area is spectacular. Some of the more special birds seen include the Little Sparrowhawk. African Hawk Eagle, Common Quail, Blue-spotted Wood Dove, Eastern Grey Plantain Eater, Ross's Turaco, Blue-headed Coucal, African Wood Owl, Broad-billed Roller, Common Schimitarbill, Black-billed Barbet, Red-throated Wryneck, Brown Babbler, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, African Moustached Warbler, Yellow-Bellied Hyliota, Black-headed Batis, Northern Puffback, Black-headed Gonolek, Cop-

per Sunbird, Black-billed Weaver, Black Bishop, Fan-tailed Widowbird, Fawn-breasted Waxbill and Steel Blue Whydah. At night the sounds of the Scops and African Wood Owl may often be heard, together with the liquid whistle of the Montane Nightjar.

Vegetation is varied due to cropping and different soil conditions in the area. The birding described below is split into sections based upon habitat and the birds you can expect to see.

The gardens

One of the most spectacular features of Koru are the gardens, which are perched on a hill overlooking the rest of the farm. These have been created over the last 30 years and it is here that a guest cottage is situated (see below). Varieties of plants are varied, including both local and exotic trees and shrubs: *Podocarpus*, *Millettia*, various acacias, figs and crotons, Tipuana, Jacaranda, Palms, Frangipani, Flamboyant, *Hibiscus*, Bougainvillea, Bottle Brush, Oleander, *Michelia*, *Thevetia*, *Heliconia*, *Duranta* and *Hamelia* among others.

Thanks to this enormous variety of plant life, many bird species have nested here, including African Green Pigeon, Ring-necked and Red-eyed Doves, Speckled Pigeon, Brown Parrot, Ross's Turaco, a pair of Verreaux's Eagle Owls, African Palm Swift, Little Swift, Speckled Mousebird, Double-toothed and White-headed Barbets, Grey Wood-

pecker, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, Lesser Striped Swallow, African Pied Wagtail, Common Bulbul, African Thrush, Northern Black Flycatcher, Red-faced Crombec, White-bellied Tit, African Blue Flycatcher, African Paradise Flycatcher, Common Fiscal, Black-capped Tchagra, Common Drongo, Greater Blue-eared Starling, Copper and

Scarlet-

chested

Sunbirds,

Grey-

headed

Sparrow,

Black-headed

and Red-

headed Weav-

ers, Red-billed

Firefinch and

Bronze Mannikin.

Klaas's

Cuckoo is found alongside

Diederik Cuckoo, which respec-

tively appear to favour the Bronze

Sunbird and Baglaffeht Weavers as foster

parents. Other birds in evidence but

as yet not recorded as breeding are

Eastern Grey Plantain-eater Levaillant's

Cuckoo, White-rumped Swift, Wood-

land Kingfisher, Cardinal Woodpecker,

Wire-tailed Swallow, Yellow-throated

Leaflove, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Grey-

backed Cameroptera, Grey-capped War-

bler, Sulphur-breasted Bush Shrike,

Tropical Boubou, Black Cuckoo-shrike

and Rüppell's Long-tailed Starling. With

all the colour and pollen in the gardens

other sunbirds to be found include Col-

lared, Western Violet-backed, Variable,

Purple-banded, Northern Double-col-

lared, Amethyst and Green-headed. At

certain times of the year, just after the rains, the Red-chested Cuckoo is a common sight, often being noisily pursued by the White-browed Robin Chat which seems to be a favoured victim. In the eyes of some, the gardens are a perfect dining table and they are therefore well

patrolled by the

African Harrier-

hawk, African

Goshawk and

Little Sparrow-

hawk.

Sugar plantations and borders

On flatter ground where soils are reasonable the main crop grown is sugarcane. These lush green plantations are the favoured haunt of the Red-collared Widowbird, Fan-tailed Widowbird, Fawn-breasted

Waxbill, Common Waxbill, Blue-

headed Coucal, Jackson's Golden-

backed Weaver and the Yellow and

Black Bishops. The sugar is bisected by

grassy tracks to allow field maintenance,

on which it is easy to observe Common

Quail, Plain-backed Pipit and Yellow-

throated Longclaw. Once every 18

months the sugarcane is burnt and har-

vested, and the resulting open fields at-

tract Black-bellied Bustards, African

Wattled and Senegal Plovers along with

hundreds of migrating White and

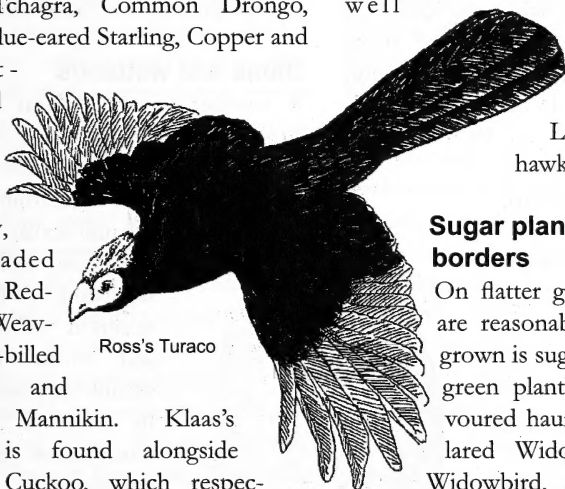
Abdim's Storks and the occasional soli-

tary Black Stork. The Eurasian Marsh

Harrier can also often be seen quarter-

ing these areas. Other visitors are the

occasional Pied and Northern



Wheatear, flocks of Yellow Wagtails and mixed groups of Barn Swallows and Common House Martins that 'jam' the telephone wires.

Sugarcane borders and stream lines

Between the cane fields and along the farm roads there is a lot of waste ground with thickets comprising mainly lantana and guava. In these semi-permanent 'hedge-rows' can be found the White-browed Coucal, Blue-naped Mousebird, Black-lored, Arrow-marked and Brown Babblers and Black-headed Gonolek. The Red-billed Quelea is an occasional visitor greedily eyeing maize planted in adjacent farms. At certain times of the year the Black-and-white Cuckoo seems to adopt these hedges as its home.

A number of seasonal and permanent stream beds are to be found. Thick vegetation extends up to 25 m on either side, which may include naturalised lantana and guava but also various species of *Acacia* and *Ficus*, *Albizia grandibracteata*, *Phoenix reclinata*, *Syzygium guineense* and a large selection of woody shrubs. Birds found in these areas include African Emerald Cuckoo, Grey-throated and Yellow-billed Barbet, Slender-billed and Yellow-whiskered Greenbul, White-browed

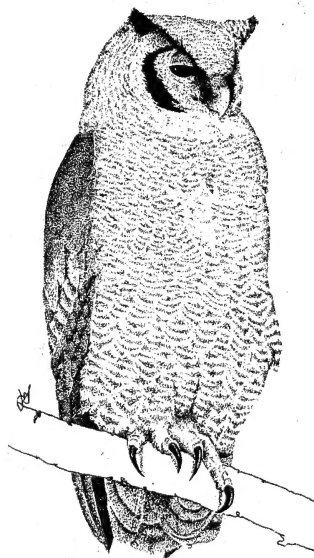
Scrub Robin, African Moustached Warbler, Red-faced, Singing and Winding Cisticolas, White-chinned Prinia, Yellow White-eye, Common and Black-throated Wattle-eye, Black-billed and Grosbeak Weavers. At night the distant sounds of the Scops and African Wood Owl often originate from these areas.

Dams and wetlands

A number of small dams have been constructed along some of these water courses. Some of these are surrounded by riverine scrub, but where they are bordered by sugarcane fields a selection of indigenous and exotic trees and shrubs have been planted. In some of the dams, water lilies have been introduced.

Birds commonly recorded here are the Little Grebe, Sacred Ibis, Little and Yellow-billed Egrets, Grey and Black-headed Herons, Hamerkop, Grey Crowned Crane, Black Crake, Green and Wood Sandpipers, African Pygmy, Striped and Giant

Kingfisher and the Cape Wagtail. Occasional visitors include the Long-tailed Cormorant, Little Bittern, Black-crowned Night and Common Squacco Herons, African Open-billed and Yellow-billed Storks, Red-knobbed Coot, Fulvous Whistling Duck, Egyptian Goose, Northern Shoveler and Lesser Flamingo.



Verreaux's Eagle Owl

Semi-open hillsides

Hillsides have two types of vegetation. Either they are cleared for grazing, with some remaining trees such as species of *Acacia*, *Albizia*, *Croton*, *Terminalia*, *Combretum*, *Erythrina*, *Ficus*, *Bauhinia*, *Kigelia* and *Markhamia*, or they are covered with deciduous woodland comprising various genera, including the species listed above, with woody undercover, interspersed with open glades where soil is poor. Certain areas are planted out with *Eucalyptus* or *Casuarina* trees. Some of these plantations have an underbrush of mixed woody herbs and some smaller trees, while others are cleared under the canopy to allow grazing. In these areas the ground cover comprises grasses, mainly of *Hyparrhenia* and *Imperata* species.

These hillsides provide rich pickings, with flocks of Cattle Egrets following the cattle, Hadada Ibis, Scaly Francolin, Helmeted Guineafowl, Tambourine Dove, both the Blue-spotted and Emerald-spotted Wood Doves and occasionally the Namaqua Dove, Broad-billed Roller, Green Wood Hoopoe, Common Scimitarbill, Black-and-white Casqued Hornbill, Black-billed and Spot-flanked Barbets, Red-fronted and Yellow-rumped Tinkerbirds, Greater and Lesser Honeyguides, Red-throated Wryneck, Nubian Woodpecker, both the Black and White-headed Saw-wing, Pale Flycatcher, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, Buff-bellied Warbler, Black-throated Apalis, Black-headed Batis and Holub's Golden and Spectacled Weavers. Other seasonal visitors to these wooded slopes are the Common Buzzard, Eurasian Hobby, Lesser Kestrel, Eurasian, Afri-

can and Red-chested Cuckoo, Eurasian, White-throated and Madagascar Bee-eaters, three roller species (Eurasian, Lilac-breasted and Rufous-crowned), Hoopoe, Crowned Hornbill, Tree Pipit, Spotted Flycatcher, Common Whitethroat, Blackcap, Willow Warbler, Olivaceous Warbler, Yellow-bellied Hyliota, Red-backed and Grey-backed Shrikes, Brown-capped Tchagra, Black-backed and Northern Puffbacks, three orioles (African Golden, Eurasian Golden and Black-headed), and the Violet-backed Starling.

Koru plays host to many other interesting birds. These include Marabou Stork, Laughing Dove, Bare-faced Go-away Bird, Mottled, Nyanza and Horus Swifts, Little Bee-eater, Banded and African Rock Martins, Red-rumped and Mosque Swallows, African Grey Flycatcher, Pied Crow, Stuhlmann's, Superb and Wattled Starlings, Red-billed Oxpecker, Lesser Masked Weaver, Steel-blue Whydah, Pin-tailed Whydah, African Citril, and Brimstone and Yellow-fronted Canaries.

This incredible array of birdlife is also seen by others as a source of food. It is not surprising that the following array of raptors has been seen: African Cuckoo Hawk, Bat Hawk, Bataleur, Black-chested Snake Eagle, Brown Snake Eagle, Great Sparrowhawk, Shikra, Gabar Goshawk, Augur Buzzard, Long-chested Eagle, Martial Eagle, African Hawk Eagle, Tawny Eagle, Wahlberg's Eagle, African Fish Eagle, Black Kite, Black-shouldered Kite, Pygmy Falcon and Lanner Falcon.

Where to stay

Homa Lime has its own guest cottage capable of offering full board accommodation. There are two double rooms, both with en-suite bathrooms, a living room, veranda and kitchen. The cottage is situated on the farm residential compound in one of the most stunning gardens in Kenya. Also on offer are two tennis courts, a swimming pool and horse riding. Bookings can be made by calling Homa Lime on 0341-51064/65/72 and asking for Mrs Brooks.

Getting there

Visiting Koru requires your own transport. The route is the main road from Nairobi to Kisumu, turning off at the bottom of the escarpment past Kericho

in the direction of Muhoroni. The road from Nairobi is generally good and four wheel drive is not necessary. Fuel is available in Muhoroni (7 km) and Kericho (52 km). A detailed map of the route is available upon request when making a booking.

Nearby areas of interest

Koru is ideal for anyone interested in viewing the birds of Western Kenya, either as a stop off on route or as a base. Excellent birding localities within easy reach are Lake Victoria, Ahero Rice Scheme, South Nandi Forest, Kakamega Forest and the Mau Forest in Kericho.



Brown Snake Eagle

Birding in... Ndara Ranch, Voi

Marlene Reid, P O Box 80429, Mombasa

Ndara Ranch is 2 km from the Nairobi-Mombasa road, about 17 km from Voi in the direction of Mombasa, looking onto the Sagalla Hills. It is basically a cattle ranch but has a lodge with accommodation in small bungalows. There is a pretty good restaurant, cold beers and sodas, and a small, very clean swimming pool. The proprietors and staff are friendly and welcoming. However, as a keen birder, the thing that attracts me most to Ndara is the excellent bird watching. It is situated on the edge of Tsavo East National Park but is not restricted by park rules, so one can take lovely walks through the bush where a wide variety of birds can be seen.

Even a lazy sojourn by the pool or a gentle stroll around the garden yields a wonderful number of birds. Ndara must be one of the easiest places in Kenya to observe Hunter's Sunbird. On occasion, up to 10 males can be seen flitting on the *Euphorbia* hedge like so many jewels. Better than Aladdin's cave.

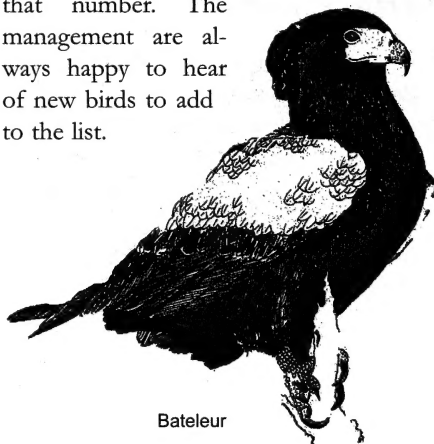
White-crested Helmet-shrikes click their way round the trees and Golden-breasted Starlings are regular visitors. Other species occurring in and around the garden include White-bellied Go-away-bird, Black-throated Barbet, Red-rumped and Lesser Striped Swallows, Spotted Morning Thrush, Bare-eyed Thrush, Chin-spot Batis, Brubru, Grey-headed Bush-Shrike, Black-headed Oriole, Black-bellied Sunbird and Red-headed Weaver.

The duetting of the Slate-coloured Boubou constantly echoes from under the surrounding bushes which, during migration seasons, are thronged by birds. Plenty of warblers from Europe and Asia to challenge identification skills, not to mention Sprossers, Nightingales, and Irania if you are lucky. Eurasian, Blue-cheeked and Somali Bee-eaters also pass through at varying times and there is often a profusion of Little Bee-eaters drinking at the pool with swallows and swifts in the later afternoon. A sprinkler used during a dry season morning will attract a regular babble of avian bathers. Overhead there are always raptors on careful watch and a Bateleur will regularly drop by to see if a tasty snack lurks unawares.

Other Afrotropical species in the bush-land include Black-and-white Cuckoo, Abyssinian Scimitarbill, Red-fronted Warbler, Rosy-patched Bush-Shrike, Green-winged Pytilia, Blue-capped Cordon-bleu, Somali Golden-breasted Bunting and, at the right time of year (around May) if you get really lucky, Steel-blue Whydah, making Ndara a place where (with the exception of Broad-tailed Paradise) the whole range of whydahs can be seen. Then there are the surprise visitors, such as the Somali race *loriti* of Lilac-breasted Roller — perhaps things got too hot at home.

About 150 species are regularly seen at Ndara. A concentrated study of the

area over a longer period than I am ever able to manage would probably double that number. The management are always happy to hear of new birds to add to the list.



Bateleur

Staying there

Kenya resident rates of accommodation are very reasonable: at the time of writing, KSh 1,800 for a double room, half board. There are other varying rates to suit different pockets, including 'bed only' at KSh 600 per person. There is also a camp site. A stop-over at Ndara on a trip to Mombasa makes a welcome break from the perils of the dreadful road, and even a special trip is well worthwhile. Ndara can be contacted on tel 0147-30463/30207 or Box 3 Voi. Pick-up, transfers and game drives can also be arranged from the Lodge.

Kenya Birds on the web?

No, we haven't yet put together a website for Kenya Birds (though it will definitely feature on the new Nature Kenya site — check out www.naturekenya.org very soon). 'KenyaBirds' is a UK-based site (named before the designers knew about our publication) that contains various species checklists, updates on interesting recent sightings, and photographs of a variety of Kenyan birds. Visitors will also now find sample articles from 'Kenya Birds' itself and records reported to the EANHS Bird Committee. Designer Helen Harris writes:

"We started building the site last year after our fifth birding trip to your country. Our main driver was the lack of information on the internet specifically relating to Kenyan birdlife. We were aware that many people visit for the 'Big 5' but felt that people were missing out on the opportunity to see a diverse and fascinating avifauna."

We couldn't agree more! The site is an entirely amateur and non-profit venture, and can be found at www.kenyabirds.org.uk.

News from Kenya and abroad

Ornithology Department

Ringling at Kindani, Meru

On 10–12 March 2000, members of the Nairobi Ringing Group ringed at Kindani Camp, on the southern border of Meru National Park. The trip was intended to update the avifaunal inventory of the park and its environs. The group consisted of Mark Mallalieu, who is also the patron of the Nairobi Ringing Group, Mr and Mrs Jeffrey James, Chris Hill, John Musina, Michael Macharia and George Eshiamwata. We arrived on 10 March and after pitching nets that same evening were pleased to catch a Willow Warbler and a Black-throated Wattle-eye.

On the morning of 11 March, nets were unfurled at 06:00 h. After four rounds 22 birds from 12 species were caught and ringed. Of particular interest among the Afrotropicals were Grey-olive Greenbul, Peters's Twinspot and Golden Palm Weaver, with Nightingale, Marsh Warbler and Garden Warbler among the Palaearctic migrants. At 10:00 h we furled nets and spent the rest of the day birding in the park. Interesting species spotted included Madagascar Bee-eater, Broad-billed Roller, White-eared Barbet, Croaking Cisticola, Isabelline Wheatear, Taita Fiscal and Black-bellied Sunbird. We tried to spot the Taita Falcon that was supposed to be nesting on one of the rock outcrops in the park interior, but without luck. Back at camp, we shifted the nets to other sites not far away.

After five rounds the next morning a total of 40 birds from 15 different species had been caught and ringed. We were excited to catch a Black-bellied Sunbird, and no fewer than ten Jameson's Firefinches! We also had Northern Brownbul, Yellow Bishop and Zanzibar Sombre Greenbul.

After furling the nets we decided to walk along the perimeter fence of the park on the Kindani side. Among the species seen were Yellow-bellied Greenbul, White-winged Widowbird and African Penduline Tit. The high point came when, with the aid of a tape, we located a group of Hinde's Babbler. The group intercepted us and continued calling persistently from the lower canopy of the *Titbonia diversifolia* bushes.

The next day was to be our last, and as usual nets were opened at dawn. In the first round we had the White-browed Robin Chat — needing careful checking to distinguish it from Rüppell's Robin Chat. Also new on the ringing list that day were Brown-hooded and Pygmy Kingfisher, a white morph African Paradise Flycatcher, and Black-and-white Mannikin. Over the morning we ringed a total of 43 birds from 18 species.

As we were leaving for Nairobi, a Martial Eagle was spotted aloft in the sky just near the park's main gate, as if to bid us goodbye. We certainly left convinced of Meru National Park's status as an Important Bird Area (IBA).

Many thanks to Mark Mallalieu for sponsoring the NRG's participation, and to the Kenya Museum Society for its continued support of the Group. — *Michael Maina and George Eshiamwata, Ornithology Department, P O Box 40658, Nairobi, Kenya*

Nairobi Ringing Group at Athi River

Two days after the onset of the first rains, on the weekend of 8 April 2000, the Nairobi Ringing Group again visited the School for Field Studies at Athi River to demonstrate bird ringing.

Our frequent visits to SFS, where we always use the same net positions, almost qualify it as another 'constant effort' study site that we could use to monitor bird movements and seasonality.

The landscape was still brown but recent rains had brought down a lot of Palaearctic warblers, which were noisily singing in the bushes all around. We caught Marsh Warbler, Upcher's Warbler, Common Whitethroat, Garden Warbler and Willow Warbler, as well as three Spotted Flycatchers. Four out of the 25 Afrotropical species captured were 'old' birds that we had caught in previous years — unfortunately, all 12 of the migrants were 'new!' — *Titus Imboma, Ornithology Department, P O Box 40658, Nairobi, Kenya*

More lower Tana forest fragments surveyed

The lower Tana River forests are located in Coast Province in Tana River District. They form an Important Bird Area because of the threatened birds

they contain (such as East Coast Akalat and Spotted Ground Thrush) among an impressive range of special coastal forest species. The forests' cover around 3,700 ha in total but they are fragmented into around 71 distinct sites. As part of the World Bank/GEF Tana River Primate National Reserve project, the department's forest team is surveying the 16 fragments that fall within the reserve, with a total area of around 1,000 ha.

Last year four fragments (Mchelelo, Mnazini North, Mnazini South and Congolani Central) were surveyed. In February 2000, we visited Guru North, Guru South and Makere West fragments. As well as looking at the bird community, the team assessed vegetation structure. All the fragments showed considerable impact from people, especially Makere West. This was reflected in the birds — no threatened species was recorded at any site, and there were very few forest undergrowth birds in Makere West. On the other hand, Retz's Red-billed Helmet-shrike, not located in 1999, turned out to be a relatively common species in Makere. Guru North and Guru South were in better condition than Makere and held a good range of coastal forest birds, including the near-threatened Fischer's Turaco. Pel's Fishing Owl was also sighted in Guru North, one of the smallest forest fragments so far surveyed. Detailed reports on both the 1999 and 2000 are available from the Ornithology Department. — *George Amutete, Ornithology Department, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

Hot off the press

Two new Ornithology Department research reports are now available:

No. 36: *Preliminary avifaunal surveys in the lower Tana River Forests: Guru North, Guru South and Makere West* (Amutete, G. & Eshiamwata, G.), 2000.

No. 37: *Monitoring of waterbirds in Kenya, July 1999 and January 2000*. (Nasirwa, O. & Owino, A.), 2000.

These (and most other reports from no. 14 onwards) are available in the Nature Kenya office.

Students and staff

Congratulations to Mwangi Githiru and Kiptoo Kosgey for successfully defending their MSc theses at Kenyatta and Moi Universities, respectively. Fabian Musila (Sokoke Pipit), Mburu Chege (Egyptian Vulture), Ronald Mulwa (Taita White-eye) and Edward Waiyaki (Taita Thrush) are all through with fieldwork and now analysing data and writing up their theses. In January 2000 Joseph Oyugi took up a PhD scholarship at the University of Illinois at Chicago (where two other East African ornithologists, Norbert Cordeiro and Gitogo Maina, are already studying). Also in January, Jean Githaiga and Kariuki Ndag'ang'a left for Cape Town, having been awarded MacArthur Fellowships to study for the MSc in Conservation Biology there. Intern Benard Okeyo was awarded a scholarship to study for his MSc in wetland management in Germany, and Evans Okong'o was selected as the Africa intern for

2000 in the Ramsar Convention Bureau (in Gland, Switzerland): congratulations to them both. John Musina is the new IBA Research Fellow, taking on Kariuki Ndag'ang'a's role, while Alfred Owino has been appointed as a Research Scientist to help fill the gap left by Oyugi's departure.

Some of the collaborative work being done by the Department is mentioned below. Staff were also kept busy with fieldwork in Laikipia for our study of how land-use changes affect bird communities (see *Kenya Birds* 7: 3). More time was spent at Mpala Ranch in February and May 2000, continuing the long-term ringing study initiated by Dr Jim Lynch (see *Kenya Birds* 7: 107).

Thanks to the interns who have helped with our work since the last *Kenya Birds*, namely Bernard Amakobe, Fred Barasa, George Eshiamwata, Jasper Kirika, Michael Maina, Nicodemus Nalinya, Philip McOsano, John Musina, Benard Okeyo, Evans Okong'o and Dan Omolo.

Wings across frontiers

Researchers from other countries continue to link with the Ornithology Department to carry out fundamental bird



Von der Decken's Hornbill

studies. Some of this work is outlined below, together with field updates from the Kenyan researchers who have taken part.

All in the family: domestic roles among Grey-capped Social Weavers

One major goal of behavioural ecology is to understand the diversity of forms of societies found in nature. Why, for example, do some birds breed as solitary pairs and others in dense colonies? Why do some defend territories while others do not? Why do a small minority of birds (about 3% of the world's species) live with their relatives in family-based societies, and why do only a few percent of these form groups composed of many families.

Our study investigates the family structure and family dynamics of one such co-operatively breeding bird, the Grey-capped Social Weaver (GCSW), in Laikipia district. We are investigating the ecological and social factors that shape the different forms of family structure in GCSWs.

This bird species is particularly interesting because it shows great variation in its social organisation. It may live in simple ('nuclear') families, in complex ('extended') families, or in colonies composed of several family units. The sparrow-weavers of East Africa live only in nuclear families, sociable weavers of South Africa always live in big colonies with as many as 60 families in a single compound nest, and GCSW fall somewhere in between.

A new series of evolutionary models, known as reproductive skew theory, try to predict how reproduction is shared within groups of relatives. In other words, they predict when different family structures will occur. They do so based on such factors as the expected success of independent breeding, the total reproductive productivity of families breeding together, and the genetic relatedness among different family members.

A 'high skew' society is one in which reproduction is monopolised by one or just a few dominant individuals. A 'low skew' society is one where reproduction is more equally shared, with most or all individuals reproducing. Among East African birds, Green Wood-hoopoes and Arrow-marked Babblers are examples of species where the dominant pair monopolises breeding. In other words, they live in high skew, nuclear family groups. White-fronted Bee-eaters and Superb Starlings, on the other hand, are species in which most females of reproductive age breed at the same time. They live in low skew, extended family groups. Why these different patterns?

Our study aims to answer this question. Among the social weavers, we will measure the costs and benefits to individuals of living in different types and sizes of family groupings (i.e. their nesting success and survival). Once the basic links between family structure and these costs and benefits are known, we can try to manipulate them experimentally and see how this affects the family structure. The final result of this work should be better models for explaining

the social evolution of family-living birds, as well as other vertebrates in general. — *Stephen Emlen and Natalia Demong, Department of Neurobiology and Behavior, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 14853-2702, USA, e: ste1@cornell.edu.*

Social weaver searches

On 19 March 2000, Fred Barasa and I travelled to Nanyuki to join Stephen Emlen and Natalia Demong at the Mpala Research Centre. Stephen and Natalia, from the Ornithology Laboratory at Cornell University, USA, were taking a first look the local Grey-capped Social Weavers and Superb Starlings to see if they would be suitable for a study of so-called 'reproductive skew'. Both of these species are known to be co-operative breeders, which means that 'extra' birds assist to rear the young. The family structure can be very variable, making them ideal for reproductive skew studies.

Initially, we expected to concentrate on the starlings, because we had trapped and ringed them already around the Centre. However, the social weavers turned out to be more promising. Grey-capped Social Weavers are small cooperatively-breeding birds that build clusters of nests on a single or many *Acacia* trees. The birds prefer to nest in short trees of about 4–8 m height. Their nests, like those of sparrows but unlike those of other weavers, are thatched rather than woven. During this reconnaissance visit, we found a number of birds breeding on the ranches closer to Nanyuki, which are

near Mount Kenya and seem to have more rain and cloud early in the season. Further away from the mountain, on Mpala and neighbouring ranches, there was no sign of breeding, but the birds were seen carrying nesting materials and building and renovating old nests.

The reconnaissance visit was positive — the social weavers seemed suitable for a study of reproductive skew. We returned to Mpala in May for bird monitoring work at the centre and spent an extra eight days (from 16–24 May 2000) ringing Grey-capped Social Weavers on Mpala and Segera Ranches in Laikipia District. The idea was to colour-band and blood-sample as many social weavers as possible while they were foraging near their nests during the breeding season. At other times of the year the birds forage far from their nests and are very hard to catch.

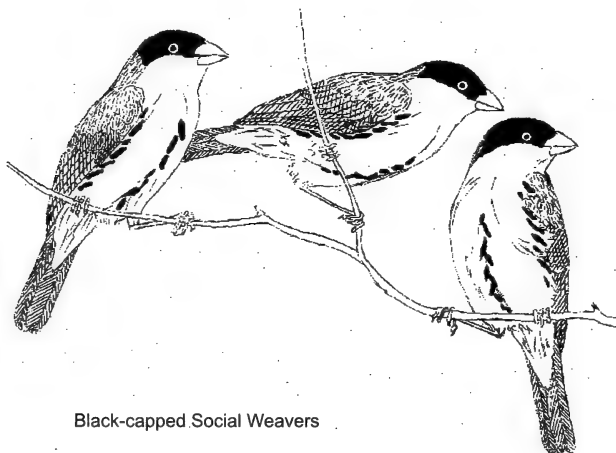
Mpala and the surrounding ranches contain two main soil types, red and 'black cotton'. A mixture of acacia species (*A. brevispica*, *A. etbaica*, *A. gerrardii*, *A. mellifera*, *A. nilotica* and *A. xanthophloea*) is found on the red soils, while the black cotton is mainly dominated by one species, the 'whistling thorn' *A. drepanolobium*. Within Mpala Ranch we found no active nests in the black soil area. We therefore confined our work to the red soils where the birds were observed breeding. There may have been additional sites with active breeding colonies in this area, which we were unable to sample due to limitations of time. Segera Ranch is mostly a black cotton soil area, hence dominated by 'whistling thorn'.

Using mist nets, we captured birds in identified sites. Co-ordinates of the sites were plotted using a GPS. The bearings of sites that were already established could be easily identified on the map. Captured birds were ringed with both metal and colour rings. Three colour rings were put on the left leg and a metal and colour ring was attached on the right leg. Each bird received a unique colour-ring combination, which

apart in any other way) and, for breeding birds, to work out who are the real parents of the chicks.

Before pitching the nets, we had to take into account the directions in which the birds flew in and out of the trees and the wind. Timing was also crucial. It was best to open the nets while the birds were away in the very early morning, since they usually returned in a flock at around 07:00 h.

We selected two sites on Segera Ranch, both on the black cotton soil. Four sites were sampled on the red soil within Mpala Ranch. Most of the sites were associated with human activities — such as housing, cattle dips, entrance gates and camping grounds. The red soil sites all had other weaver species nesting in the same trees, including Black-capped Social Weavers,



Black-capped Social Weavers

will be of use during later field observations. 'Super glue', a strong liquid adhesive, was used to seal the colour bands. As well as the usual measurements and moult scores, we noted the presence or absence of a brood patch, an indication of breeding condition in individual birds. Blood samples for DNA analysis were also extracted before the birds were released. This involves carefully puncturing the main wing vein with a surgical needle and capturing a drop or two of blood in a capillary tube. These samples can later be used to assess sex (it is difficult to tell males and females

Chestnut Weavers, Vitelline Masked Weavers and Chestnut Sparrows. Overall we captured and banded 157 Grey-capped Social Weavers, as well as a number of other species.

We saw Chestnut Sparrows *Passer eminibey* being chased from the nest by the Grey-capped Social Weavers, an indication that they probably are using the weavers' old and abandoned nests.

The birds were not nesting in the black cotton soil on Mpala Ranch, where colonies have been seen in the past. Most of the colonies we saw elsewhere had some connection to human

activities on the ranches. As well as increasing safety from predators for nesting birds, this may improve access to water. During our survey the area was still dry from a prolonged drought, and natural water points had dried up: the Mpala black cotton soil area might have been abandoned for this reason.

Thanks to the Mpala Ranch management for taking good care of us during our stay, and for land-owners for permission to work on their properties. The following members of the Ornithology Department and Nairobi Ringing Group took part in the reconnaissance and ringing work: George Amutete, Fred Barasa, Titus Imboma, Silvester Karimi, Michael Maina, John Musina and Nicodemus Nalanyia. — *Titus Imboma and Fred Barasa, Ornithology Department, P O Box 40658, Nairobi, Kenya.*

A bustard family tree

The bustards (family Otididae) are a charismatic group, and have always attracted people's attention. They were once deemed royal game because of their stately appearance: in modern times, extensive hunting has resulted in many species becoming threatened. Yet despite all the ecological and conservation attention directed at them, their evolutionary relationships still remain unclear.

This project aims to work out these relationships. The bustards are mainly an African group — 21 of the world's 25 species occur on this continent. No-one is quite sure how many bustard species there are, and several groups of

closely-related species are not well studied. This project uses several independent sets of data, including genetic and morphological characters, to examine possible relationships among the different bustards.

The distribution of the bustards mirrors that of the arid areas. They are thus ideal candidates for examining the biogeography of the African continent and looking at evolutionary patterns across dry zones. In particular, this project examines the separation between the dry zones in the north-east and south-west of the continent. Several species have populations in both these arid areas.

Fieldwork in Kenya, during which fresh specimens were obtained and the museum collection was examined, was undertaken in August/September 1999. Preliminary findings suggest that the widely separated populations of several species found in both the north-east and south-west may actually be separate species. Using molecular clock techniques, the project will calculate the approximate time when these sister species split off from each other.

The conservation of bustards is currently a focus of much attention. The project's work on genetic differentiation and population structure, including the clarification of species complexes, will provide insight into conservation prioritisation and management. — *Callan Cohen, Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa, e: batis@iafrica.com*

What larks! Understanding a distinctive Old World family

The larks (family Alaudidae), are an ancient and highly distinct family of birds with no apparent close relatives. They are mainly an Old World group. Out of the currently accepted 84 species, 67 occur in Africa, and 52 are endemic to the Afrotropics. Lark species richness is greatest in the semi-arid and arid regions of the continent. The two primary centres of endemism are:

- the north-east arid zone (Kenya, Ethiopia & Somalia) where 17 of the 35 currently recognised species are endemic or near-endemic;
- the south-west arid zone (South Africa, Namibia & Botswana), where 19 of the 23 currently recognised species are endemic or near-endemic.

These two widely separated dry zones are both ancient and very stable regions. They have common biological origins and their separation has driven the speciation of arid-zone animals and plants.

Cryptic species

Traditionally, taxonomy has been based on the appearance and measurement of different parts of the body ('morphometric' characters). However, larks have 'cryptic', camouflaging plumage. They also vary a great deal even within species and genera. In such cases, classifications based on morphometric characters are often inadequate and may even be misleading. Molecular techniques provide an objective way of revealing variation that may be hidden if one looks just at appear-

ance. In southern Africa, despite detailed taxonomic treatment in the past, recent genetic analyses suggest a great deal of hidden diversity among larks. Genetically, behaviourally and ecologically distinct species have been previously lumped together because they happen to look alike. For example, ongoing research suggests that the so-called Long-billed Lark *Mirafra curvirostris* is actually made up of five distinct species.

Species are the units of conservation and biodiversity. They need to be accurately and appropriately defined before population numbers, population trends and conservation action can be assessed. About one-fifth of Africa's larks are currently considered globally threatened or near-threatened. The group requires much greater conservation attention.

Project objectives

- (1) To sample as many as possible of the north-east arid zone lark taxa, to assess their taxonomic status and identify 'cryptic' species and sub-species for conservation purposes.
- (2) To focus attention on larks that are globally threatened or near-threatened, and/or highly localised, and accurately determine their distribution, habitat preference, diet and regional conservation status.
- (3) To reconstruct the evolutionary history and biogeography for the north-east arid zone lark taxa, using a combination of genetic, morphological and behavioural data.



Barred Owlet

- (4) To compare the evolution of the north-east and south-west lark complexes. An understanding of the evolutionary history of areas with many endemics is vital to forming long-term conservation plans.

Progress so far

The evolutionary history and relationships of Africa's arid zone larks are being examined through sequencing part of the mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) cytochrome-b gene. The majority of the southern African lark complex has already been collected and sequenced; only further samples from the north-east arid region and North Africa are required. The genetic taxonomic measure will be combined with evidence from morphological and behavioural characters (e.g. song vocalisations, display flights, foraging technique, reproductive behaviour) to provide a

multi-disciplinary assessment of the taxa present in the complex.

Two field seasons have been spent in East Africa. The first (1998) was in Tanzania, where the focus was on collecting, the second (August-September 1999) mainly in Kenya. We collected nine lark taxa at various localities within Kenya, mainly near Shaba, Naro Moru and south of Nairobi. The many specimens that are stored in the museum will also be used to supply morphological and plumage variables. For those species that cannot be collected, the National Museums of Kenya is supplying vital tissue and/or feathers from study skins to plug the gaps. DNA extraction and sequencing work is currently underway at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. — *Keith Barnes, Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa, e: kbarnes@botzoo.uct.ac.za*

Blackcaps help unravel migration secrets

Many bird species that breed in Europe and Asia migrate to southern countries at the end of the breeding season. Migration requires several changes in behaviour and physiology. These are controlled by a number of factors, including hormones produced by various glands in the body. However, it is not at all clear how these hormones actually control bird migration. In this project, we are studying the relationship between migratory behaviour and hormone levels by comparing migrant and non-migrant populations of Blackcaps *Sylvia atricapilla*.

The migratory behaviour of Blackcaps is among the best known of any bird, thanks to the long-term work by Peter Berthold and his collaborators. In this species, populations breeding in north-eastern Europe are long-distance migrants that winter in East Africa. There is only one 'pure' resident population of Blackcaps, on the Cape Verde islands. These Cape Verde Blackcaps do not show migratory restlessness at the times when birds of other populations do.

We want to compare the migratory behaviour and the hormonal profile between resident Cape Verde Blackcaps and migrant ones, during periods when the migrants show migratory activity. This means looking at birds from north-eastern Europe in the northern autumn and from East Africa in spring. In particular, we will record the migratory restlessness of birds of both populations during the autumnal migratory period and take blood samples to measure the levels of gonadal hormones (androgens and oestrogens), melatonin and corticosteroids. This will allow us to distinguish factors that are correlated with migratory behaviour from those that are controlled by annual cycles.

From 19 February to 6 March 2000 I worked with Fred Barasa of the Ornithology Department, and other colleagues from Germany, to capture Blackcaps in an area of woodland around the Mountain Rock Hotel, near Naro Moru, on the western slopes of Mt Kenya. Many Blackcaps were heard singing in the forest along the Burguret River, but they were scarce or absent in

the surrounding dry woodland. The birds were caught with mist-nets with the aid of song playback. Nets were usually placed along low bushes or fences on the edge of the forest. We caught roughly equal proportions of the two subspecies wintering in Kenya, *Sylvia atricapilla atricapilla* (57%) and *S. a. dammholzi* (43%). The sub-species *dammholzi* is usually paler above and whiter below than *atricapilla*, but some birds were difficult to classify. At capture the birds weighed between 16.5 and 22.25 g. All the males were lean, with an average fat score of just 0.5 on a 0-8 scale. Most of the birds were moulting. Immediately after capture the birds were housed in special cages, composed of a wooden plate on which three U-shaped metal frames were inserted. A white cotton sack formed the sides and the top of the cage.

We fed the birds a mixture of commercial dry insect food, boiled eggs and banana, along with live mealworms. Many birds had to be force-fed to begin with; those that did not start feeding by themselves were released after two days.

On 8 March, 28 Blackcaps were transported to Mombasa by plane and the following day made the long flight to Europe (though this time not under their own steam!), landing at Munich, Germany. All the birds survived the journey, though unfortunately one died during the following night, probably due to the stress of transport. After a 10-day quarantine, the birds were placed in individual cages equipped with activity recorders. At the time of writing (April 2000), the birds had fattened to an average weight of 25 g and showed

nocturnal migratory restlessness. Blood sampling to allow measurement of the circulating levels of hormones should start shortly. — *Leonida Fusani, Research Centre of Ornithology of the Max-Planck Society, Department of Biological Rhythms and Behaviour, von-der-Tann Strasse 7, B-82346, Andechs, Germany*

What makes temperate and tropical warblers tick?

Why are tropical and temperate bird species so different? For instance, tropical birds have much smaller clutch sizes than comparable temperate ones, and tend to have higher survival rates. When comparing tropical and temperate bird species it is particularly interesting to include long-distance migrants, because they experience both tropical and temperate environments. Recent studies also suggest that long-distance migrants are probably descended from ancestors that lived in the tropics.

The warblers in the genera *Sylvia* and *Parusoma* are a group of species especially well suited for this comparison. *Sylvia* includes familiar birds such as the Blackcap, Whitethroat and Garden Warbler, while *Parusoma* includes the Brown and Banded Parisomas in Kenya. Molecular studies indicate that these two genera are really one and the same thing — but with some species that are temperate residents, others that are tropical residents, and others that are long-distance migrants.

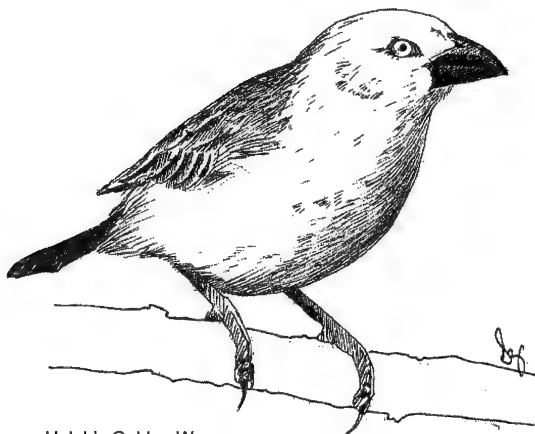
The project aims to compare the biogeography, morphology, ecology and life-history of *Sylvia/Parusoma* species with these different life-styles. Quite a lot is already known about the resident

and migratory species that breed in Europe. Much less is on record about the parisomas, and the Kenyan part of the project involves detailed ecological studies of both the Brown and Banded Parisomas, *P. lugens* and *P. boehmi* respectively.

The project is co-ordinated by Dr Katrin Böhning-Gaese from the University of Aachen in Germany. Katrin and assistant Silke Schmidt were in Kenya during April/May 2000 to make initial project arrangements and find suitable sites for studying both the parisomas. Reconnaissance turned up two good sites: Olorgesailie Prehistoric Site for *P. boehmi* and Madrugada Farm, Kabarak, for *P. lugens*. Both species are rather local and thinly spread, but this is especially so for the Brown — the reconnaissance trip showed it to be confined almost entirely to stands of large *Acacia abyssinica* or *Acacia xanthophloea* trees. Good tracts of *Acacia* woodland have become increasingly scarce as more and more land is cleared for cultivation — it may not be long before the Brown Parisoma is added to the threatened list! At Madrugada Farm, on the slopes of Menengai, sound management has kept the woodland intact and there is a healthy population of parisomas. We thank the farm management for permission to work there.

Part of the initial work was to capture and colour-ring as many parisomas as possible. These individually-identifiable birds can then be tracked and monitored over the next two or three years. At Olorgesailie, 18 birds in 11 pairs were ringed, with 16 birds in 14 pairs captured at Kabarak.

Tracking the birds is now the responsibility of research assistants George Eshiamwata (*P. boehmi*) and Fred Barasa (*P. lugens*), both of whom will be working full-time on this project. Two follow-up visits have already been made but work will become more intensive when the birds start to breed — perhaps in October/November, if the short rains arrive on time! — *Katrin Böhning-Gaese, Biologie II, RWTH Aachen, Kopernikusstr. 16, D-52074, Aachen, e: boehning@bio2.rwth-aachen.de*



Holub's Golden Weaver

Bright and flashy: carotenoids, colour and communication and in weaverbirds

Birds have a diversity of bright colour signals. Exactly how these work remains an evolutionary puzzle. This project fits recent advances in understanding how birds produce and perceive colours into an ecological and evolutionary study of colouration in the African weaverbirds (the Ploceinae).

Weavers show much parallel variation between colouration and habitat, feeding ecology, social system and signalling behaviour. Colours vary from black or brown (melanins) to bright yellow and red (carotenoids). Different species have varying degrees of differences between the sexes. The project measures colour (using reflectance spectrometry), analyses pigments and reconstructs evolutionary relationships (using mitochondrial DNA). It combines comparative tests with field studies to identify ecological and social selection pressures.

So far, reflectance measurements, feathers and blood samples have been collected from weaverbird species in South Africa and Kenya. In February 2000 an expedition to south-western Kenya produced a number of new species (see below), and collection of material is ongoing. The variation in carotenoid displays, particularly in the genus *Euplectes* (widowbirds and bishops), is a main focus of our study.

With chromatography of feathers and a mitochondrial DNA phylogeny, we will explore possible co-evolution between carotenoids, perception and ecology. The first results on carotenoid composition in feathers are just beginning to appear, and we have DNA sequence data from about half of the species. — *Staffan Andersson, Department of Zoology, Göteborg University, Box 463 SE-405 30, Göteborg, Sweden; e: staffan.andersson@zool.gu.se*

Weavers and relatives cross-examined

We made a short, intensive field trip from 1–9 February 2000, specifically focused on the weavers and bishops — species in the genera *Ploceus* and *Euplectes*. We worked in the Rift Valley and western Kenya, our travels taking us to Baringo, Kakamega, Siaya and Busia. The team was made up of two Swedish researchers, Staffan Andersson and Jonas Ornborg, with James Wachira and myself from the Department of Ornithology.

The weavers and bishops are two related genera with many species. Both are believed to be of African origin. Changes in climate must have played a big role in determining their distribution and the way that they have formed species. It seems likely that they evolved in the savannah and later invaded the forests. Their most distinctive feature is that they use weaving to build their nests. Their diets now vary but most feed on seeds, and it has been speculated that the earliest species were also seed-eaters.

The *Euplectes* species are polygynous (one male mates with many females) and show marked sexual and seasonal dimorphism (males have very different plumage from the females, which they acquire only during the breeding season). Bishops and widowbirds feed and roost in large groups in dense waterside vegetation. This kind of habitat keeps away the predators, and it probably has the most reliable food supplies. Man has greatly influenced the distribution of *Euplectes* species — these seed-eaters

have often benefited from extensive crop cultivation. Irrigation and dam building have also provided nesting sites close to the food supplies — a good example is Yala swamp.

Our aim was to trap particular *Euplectes* and *Ploceus* species, in order to take blood samples for a genetic study of the relationships within the two groups. We also used high-tech equipment to measure feather brightness in the males. The idea here was to look at the natural pigments called carotenoids. Most carotenoids are either red, orange or yellow, but purples, greens and blues can be produced by binding proteins to the pigments. Our reflectance measures would allow a better idea of how feathers with these pigments in actually look to the birds themselves.

Baringo

At our first site we were after the Northern Masked Weaver and the Northern Red Bishop, which are restricted to this part of the country. After a late arrival we set up three 12-m nets along the shore. A few scattered bulrushes here proved quite productive. Three Northern Masked Weavers were trapped with lots of other species, some of which were relevant to the study. The most interesting captures were White-billed Buffalo-weaver males — they possess an organ between the legs resembling a penis!

Other species caught were Superb Starlings, Black-headed Weaver, Cardinal Woodpecker, Little Weaver, Northern White-crowned Shrike, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Rufous Chatterer,

African Wood-hoopoe, Lesser Honeyguide and, most exciting of all, a Grey Kestrel.

We suspected that a group of tiny 'brownies' feeding on the ground were Northern Red Bishops, but they shied off from the nets. Being in their sparrowy non-breeding plumage they were difficult to identify with certainty, and hard to trap since they do not maintain territories.

Unfortunately, the prolonged dry weather meant that most of the suitable habitat had vanished. On 3 February we parked up our gear and set off to Kakamega forest via Iten, Eldoret and Kapsabet. This took us through the Kerio Valley, with its wonderful scenery. As we travelled we looked out for reedbeds, grasslands and riverine vegetation where our target birds might be found.

Kakamega Forest

We reached the forest at Isecheno too late for any serious work to be done. After obtaining permission to work here the following day, we netted in one of the glades and at its edges, but with little success. We shifted to the northern glades in Buyangu, but still without luck. After a night in Buyangu we set off to Yala Swamp via Kisumu.

Kanyaboli

On arrival we surveyed Lake Kanyaboli from the edge, embarking on our active mist-netting the following morning. Our keen interest in this part of the country was to capture three weaver species, Yellow-backed, Northern

Brown-throated and Jackson's Golden-backed, and three *Euplectes* species, Fan-tailed Widowbird, Black-winged Red and Southern Red Bishop.

Fortunately the weavers and bishops here were in breeding plumage, and by the end of the first day we already had much of what we wanted. We quickly embarked on looking for probable sites for the remaining species. We located a roosting site for Southern Red Bishop on the bank of Yala River — extensive dense vegetation of mixed *Phragmites* and *Typha*. Nets rapidly set that evening produced not much, but we agreed to return the following morning for a proper catch.

This turned out to be spectacular. Ringers beware — netting at roosts can be a nightmare (or is it a dream come true?). In a single 12-m net there were more than 60 individual birds, mainly weavers and bishops, causing the net to sag dangerously on its poles. It was a challenge for us to extract all the birds quickly and safely. We released more than we retained since we could not cope with the big number, which outstripped the supply of bird bags.

It was celebrations all round after this successful site. We managed all the expected weavers, the Southern Red Bishop and Fan-tailed Widowbird. We were only unlucky with the Black-winged Red Bishop.

On our route to Nairobi we travelled via the Busia grasslands to try and catch up with the Black Bishop. Though we did not find this species, we enjoyed surveying the first two grasslands before being overtaken by rain.

That was it for the session, but it was more than we expected for the time of the year. It was a difficult season to track down the *Euplectes* in particular, which were now in their 'sparrowy'

plumage. Work continues and we still hope to catch up with the missing species soon — Nicodemus Nalinya, Ornithology Department, P O Box 40658, Nairobi, Kenya, e: kbirds@africaonline.co.ke

Request for information

The most important 'missing' *Euplectes* species for the study are Fire-fronted Bishop *Euplectes diadematus*, Black Bishop *E. gierowii* and Hartlaub's Marsh Widowbird *E. hartlaubi*. The first is mainly a bird of eastern bushland and the coast, though it does turn up elsewhere. The others are species of grasslands in the far west of Kenya. If you come across any of these species, especially if they seem to be in breeding condition, we would be grateful to know. Please inform the Ornithology Department (contacts on the inside front page). Thank you!



White-browed
Robin Chat

Nature Kenya

News from the Bird Committee, Ringing Scheme of
Eastern Africa and the Important Bird Areas programme

World Birdwatch '99

World Birdwatch '99 was organised by a dedicated volunteer committee headed by Narinder Heyer. It was early on decided that the main focus would be the Important Bird Areas programme — raising public awareness, assisting Site Support Groups and involving schools around the IBAs.

To start things off in style, the British High Commissioner, Jeffrey James, kindly hosted a birdwatch launch event at his Nairobi residence. Over the week-end itself, public involvement was at record levels — around 1500 people participated, including 600 school-children in Mombasa. Although there was less emphasis than in previous years on

compiling a comprehensive list, at least 718 species were seen during the 48 hours — an impressive total by any standards.

Fund-raising was not the major emphasis, though many Society members and others kindly made donations or sponsored birdwatchers. Barclays Bank of Kenya, British American Tobacco (Kenya) and Tinga Tinga Ltd. were especially generous donors, along with many lodges and tour companies that provided accommodation or transport.

The beneficiaries of this sponsorship are the site-support groups, six of which received binoculars and field-guides (as well as the popular World Birdwatch t-shirts) to boost their work. Jeffrey James and his team also raised a remarkable additional 70,000/= in sponsorship. This money will go into a fund to subsidise binoculars for sale to keen bird guides and young birders who cannot afford to buy them at full price — look out for details soon in *Nature Net*.

Every 'World Birdwatch' is different, but the 1999 event must have been one of the most successful ever — a big 'thank you' to all those who gave up their valuable time and energy to organise it, who provided sponsorship, or who took part!

See the special World Birdwatch section in this issue for some birders-eye reports from around the country.

Ngulia 1999 — another record-breaking season

The 1999 season was notable for 32 days of continuous cover, from mid-

November to mid-December. This spanned not only the December new moon but the November full moon as well. The season's ringing total was the second highest ever: 23,820 birds, with four days over 2,000 and another six days over 1,000. Even during the full moon period there were catches in the hundreds when the weather was right.

The first heavy rain of the season at Ngulia occurred on 18 November. Thereafter, the weather was showery, and conditions were rarely extreme: mist was never thick and overall there was not a great deal of rain.

Tapes of migrant song were played throughout. The effect seemed to be to increase the catch on misty nights, and to attract many birds down when the mist was not down to ground level. On clear nights or nights with only high cloud, virtually no birds were attracted at all.

The catches on 4, 3 and 11 December (respectively 2,779, 2,675 and 2,553 migrants) were the 2nd, 3rd and 4th highest catches ever, exceeded only by the 3,131 of 20 November 1995. In spite of such high numbers, yearly records were broken for only two species — Barn Swallow and Marsh Warbler. Daily records were also broken for these species and for Willow Warbler. Many species were, in fact, caught in way below average numbers. We suspect that this shift in species pattern was due to the effect of the tapes.

Three unusual Palearctic species for Ngulia were ringed this year, all in December: the second ever Eurasian Swift on 9th, the ninth Common Redstart, at

night on 11th, and the eighth Icterine Warbler, during the morning of 11th.

Swallow ringing was a major additional daytime activity this season. In the past, Barn Swallows have often fed low in many hundreds just in front of the lodge. This year, large gatherings depended mainly on the use of tapes, which brought birds in almost as soon as they were switched on, around 08:00–09:00, and kept them feeding all morning and sometimes through the afternoon as well. Netting in front of the lodge brought in the impressive total of 3,570 Barn Swallows in just 12 days. Including some Common House Martin song in one tape enabled us to catch three individuals of this elusive species.

The six birds controlled with foreign rings were outstanding. They included a Barn Swallow from Kazakhstan (bearing an Italian ring) and Marsh Warblers from Slovenia, the Netherlands, Belgium (two) and Hungary. The two Belgian Marsh Warblers, both controlled on 4 December, had been ringed in the same place, by the same ringer, in two different years! The Slovenian bird was ringed at the same place (Vrhnika) as an Ngulia-ringed Marsh Warbler had been controlled in 1995. The Hungarian Marsh was only our second interchange with this country.

Almost all passerine migrants that have been ringed at Ngulia must have passed through Ethiopia. It is therefore amazing that, until now, we have never had a single recovery from there. However, we recently received details of our first Ethiopian recovery: a Sprosser to the south-west of the country. From

well-known timings of the migration schedule, we have long believed that migrants coming to Ngulia must have spent several months somewhere in Ethiopia en route. This recovery is the first indication of one of the areas 'our' birds utilise.

It was an interesting season for Afrotropical birds. Although we ringed just 408 (the lowest total since 1993), no fewer than eight species were new for the ringing list, including Peregrine Falcon, Striped Pipit, Pale Prinia and Reichenow's Weaver. Numbers of some frequently caught species were very low: only 17 Harlequin Quails, just seven Plain and two Donaldson-Smith's Nightjars, and only one Chestnut Weaver. There were no Grey-headed Kingfishers and no Black Cuckoo-shrikes.

The 1999 ringing has already produced two recoveries: a young Sprosser ringed on 22 November was retrapped in mid June while breeding at Frankfurt/Oder, in eastern Germany but on the Polish border; it was sexed as a female with five young. The other bird, an adult Marsh Warbler, ringed on 11 December, was found dead on the front of a car near Stuttgart, southwestern Germany on 15 July. In addition, details of another very interesting recovery have been reported. An adult Sprosser ringed on 23 November 1990 was killed and eaten at the end of 1999 at a place in Lake Malawi situated inside northern Mozambique. It is the only Sprosser recovery we have had to south of Ngulia and, at over nine years, our oldest recovery of any species.

For their assistance in varied ways, we thank the manager and staff at Ngulia Safari Lodge, Kenya Wildlife Service, British Airways Assisting Conservation, the Earthwatch Institute and the Wetlands Trust; as well as all 39 members of the team who made the season the success it was. — *Graeme Backhurst and David Pearson, Ngulia Ringing Group, P O Box 15194, Nairobi, e: graeme@healthnet.or.ke*

AEWA: conserving migratory waterbirds

The Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (the CMS, or Bonn Convention) is an international treaty that came into force in 1983 and was ratified by Kenya in 1999. The Convention exists because migrant animals know no political boundaries: conserving them requires co-ordinated action by all the countries that they migrate through.

The Bonn Convention provides an overall framework for conserving migrant species, as well as appendices list-

ing species of special concern. However, the convention works mainly through more detailed international Agreements. These are focused on particular species, or groups of species, that need concerted conservation action by different countries.

Of these agreements, by far the largest and most ambitious so far is the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds Agreement — AEWA for short. It covers the whole region across which waterbirds migrate from Eurasia to Africa — an area of more than 60 million square kilometres, involving 120 Range States and 170 waterbird species.

Kenya has more than 180 waterbird species, of which at least 133 are long-distance migrants (almost all probably make at least local movements). These birds depend on a chain of wetland stopover sites along their migratory routes. One hundred and nine of these species are listed under AEWA. These include spectacular species like the Lesser Flamingo that are economically very important to Kenya.

Nationally, we already have good regulations for waterbird conservation, and Kenya is already implementing many of the measures required by AEWA — for instance, hunting is strictly controlled. However, this isn't the case for many of the other countries that 'our' birds pass through on migration.

To raise the profile of AEWA and encourage Ken-



Sacred Ibis

ya's accession, Nature Kenya held a one-day seminar and workshop on 29 July 2000 at the National Museums of Kenya, with support from the Royal Netherlands Embassy. Around 70 people from a wide range of institutions attended. Speakers explained the history of AEWA and the Bonn Convention, reviewed the status and conservation of migratory waterbirds in Kenya, looked at the process of ratifying international agreements, and examined how the Bonn Convention and AEWA related to existing national and international legislation. In the afternoon, workshop groups discussed the costs and benefits of accession, waterbird conservation in Kenya, and developing national and international co-operation.

The one overriding recommendation of the meeting was that Kenya should accede to AEWA — as soon as possible. The seminar papers and workshop recommendations were published soon after by Nature Kenya as a small book, *Kenya and the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement*.

This publication was adopted as an official background paper at the first Meeting of Parties (MOP-1) to (AEWA), held back-to-back with the sixth Conference of the Parties (COP-6) in Cape Town, South Africa, from 6–16 November 1999. Oliver Nasirwa attended as a representative of Nature Kenya and the National Museums of Kenya. Several recommendations made in the report, particularly the addition of certain species to the AEWA list, were discussed and referred back to the Technical Committee. Although Kenya

had not yet acceded to AEWA, Oliver was also appointed as the alternate representative for eastern Africa on the Technical Committee.

Since then, the Cabinet has approved Kenya's accession to AEWA and the formal ratification procedure is in motion. This should be a significant step forward for the conservation of our migratory waterbirds.

Kenya and the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement is available from the Nature Kenya office.

Important Bird Areas programme: an update

Conserving Kenya's 60 IBAs is an immense challenge and one that constantly keeps the IBA team on its toes. Fortunately the number of people and organisations involved is constantly growing. Of the numerous activities since our last update, here are a few highlights.

IBA directory launched

The IBA directory for Kenya was launched during a lively and well-attended ceremony at Nairobi's Serena Hotel on 27 April 2000. Leon Bennun spoke on behalf of the authors (co-author Peter Njoroge being at that moment marooned on a small island in the Seychelles), followed by Dr George Abungu, Director-General of the National Museums of Kenya. Nehemiah Rotich, Director of Kenya Wildlife Service, kindly stepped in to read a speech on behalf of Dr Richard Leakey, who was unexpectedly called away at the last moment.

The directory has been distributed to a wide range of Kenyan institutions, including University libraries. The hope is that those involved in conservation planning and decision-making will use it as a source of useful and accurate information. Journalists writing for the national dailies already seem to have picked up on the directory's existence — several recent articles have repeated text from the site accounts more or less word-for-word!

Nature Kenya members can obtain copies of the IBA directory from the Nature Kenya office at the special price of KSh 1,000/= . Overseas, the book is available from NHBS Ltd. (www.nhbs.com).

A monitoring system for Kenya's IBAs

How can we tell if our conservation efforts in IBAs are having any positive effect? Or keep track of possible threats to particular sites? A system of regular monitoring is obviously needed. With 60 sites to worry about, this is obviously a significant challenge. To start tackling this issue, a workshop, *Developing a monitoring system for Kenya's Important Bird Areas*, was held at the Kenya Wildlife Service Training Institute, Naivasha, from 17–19 November 1999. Participants discussed the general principles of monitoring, debated the best institutional framework, decided what kind of monitoring would be appropriate for each site, and fine-tuned detailed protocols for forest, grassland and wetland IBAs.

It is very hard to find resources for long-term monitoring schemes. Because

of this, detailed monitoring can probably only happen at a relatively small number of sites, usually through the involvement of site support groups and/or the management institutions on the ground. Several SSGs are already starting to test the protocols and see if they are actually workable in the field.

For all sites, however, an update on general status is needed at least once each year. This means finding out some very basic information: for instance, is the site still there? Has it been gazetted, or de-gazetted? Have large chunks of habitat burned down — or regenerated? Have water levels gone up or down dramatically?

Kenya Birds readers can help with this a huge amount by reporting on their visits to any of the IBAs. A special form has been designed for sending in information — this has gone through several revisions and will soon be circulated with *Nature Net* (or possibly with this issue of *Kenya Birds*!). **Your observations from IBAs are badly needed — please send them in!**

IBA SSGs go from strength to strength

Nature Kenya is now actively working with six IBA Site Support Groups. Several of these are now running their own projects. The RSPB-funded project *Conservation of the Kinangop Grasslands IBA: Investing in Capacity Building* wound up successfully in February 2000. Most of the project objectives were achieved, and there was an encouraging response from the community response to a series of 'seminars', actually public meetings. The Friends of Kinangop Plateau

are reviewing their constitution and elections were held during April 2000. The group runs its own office in Murungaru town — members passing through, perhaps on their way to the Aberdares, are encouraged to visit.

A bilingual Kinangop Grasslands IBA poster is also out, with a striking illustration of Sharpe's Longclaw by Edwin Selempo. (For a copy, contact FKP or the Nature Kenya office.)

The education project of the Kakamega Forest Biodiversity Conservation and Tour Guides Association (KABICOTOA), funded through the African Bird Club, was also successfully completed. Education work will continue and greatly expand under new funding agreed with the UNDP/GEF Small Grants Programme. UNDP/GEF is making USD 70,000 available for awareness work, eco-tourism development and capacity-building in KABICOTOA and the Kakamega Environment Education Programme (KEEP). The groups will be constructing displays of snakes and butterflies (with additional support from the US Ambassador's Self Help Fund) and building canopy observation towers as well as strengthening the education and awareness programme.



African Fish Eagle

Meanwhile, the Kijabe Environment Volunteers (KENVO) won a Silver Award in the 2000 round of the BP Conservation Awards for their proposal to conduct a socio-economic study of communities adjacent to Kerita forest (part of the Kikuyu Escarpment Forest IBA). The study, which involves many KENVO members, was launched on World Environment Day, 5 June 2000, and is progressing well.

The SSGs continue to interact and to share ideas and experience. Twenty-two members of seven SSGs were brought together during a five-day course, *Fundamentals of Ornithology for Site-support Groups*, organised at Naivasha in November 1999. The SSG members also had the chance to meet members of the IBA National Liaison Committee and other participants in the monitoring workshop, and explain to them how their groups are developing.

World Birdwatch '99

...in Mombasa

This certainly proved to be a very busy week-end, with a launch at Bamburi Nature Pavilion on Friday evening where about 50 people turned up. This in no way prepared us for the overwhelming response on Saturday morning, when 606 students came for bird watching at the Nature Trail. Kelvin and his co-guiders were hard pressed to cope especially as binoculars were few and far between. Comments from students prove that there is a huge interest and every effort should be made to cater for this in a more permanent way.

Lorna Depew and myself were having a much quieter time birding at Nguuni Farm under the watchful eyes of the Ostrich. A pretty uneventful walk, the most exciting bird probably being the completely white-tailed African Paradise Flycatcher. Two Long-crested Eagles foraged over the ponds. Afternoon saw Jairus and James covering the central quarry at Bamburi while Lorna and Ian covered the forest area round their house. An exhausted Kelvin Mazera forayed down to English Point with Michael Ngoa from KMFRI with the Mama Ngina Girls bird club. where they were lucky enough to see a Eurasian Oystercatcher feeding among the various waders newly arrived from the north.

Sunday saw the three early risers out at Huseini Ponds, where they added a few more species while being drenched in a surprise shower of rain. My car was nearly impounded by the police, who were out checking for stolen vehicles,

necessitating a quick race back to rescue it. Once I had explained to them about birdwatch weekend and they had been assured on their radios that my car was not on the 'stolen' list they went happily away. Maybe we should consider stickers for parked cars next Birdwatch in these car-jacking days!

Sunday evening, with only the three die-hards — Kelvin, Jairus and myself — left, after a strenuous walk round Nguuni to try to increase our species number, saw us flopping at my favourite pond to watch the sun go down and enjoying a welcome drink. The last bird to pop onto the list was an Allen's Gallinule, not seen on that pond for about 10 years but no doubt good at hiding. Seeing we started the list with an Indian House Crow, a good ending to what was a superlative week-end with 141 species seen overall. — *Marlene Reid, P O Box 80429, Mombasa*

...in Kikuyu Escarpment Forest

Kijabe Environment Volunteers (KENVO) joined other birders in this year's World Birdwatch event that was being conducted worldwide. KENVO members enjoyed the exercise, as it was in line with the group's activities and within the scope of their mission.

Enduring long walks through hilly terrain, and sometimes dense thickets and forest, not forgetting scorching sun and extremely cold nights, demonstrated the group's determination to make World Birdwatch a meaningful event at both local and global levels. That we made it a success is thanks also

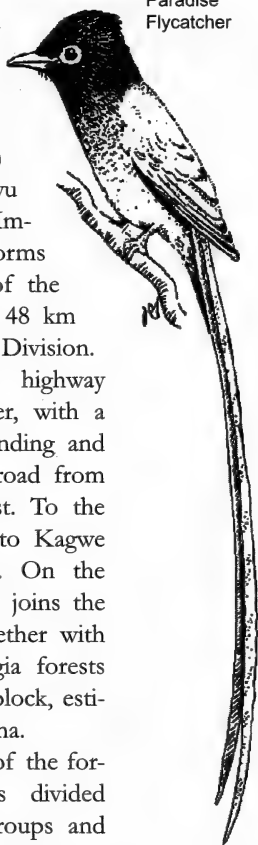
to the enthusiasm and support of Nature Kenya and the World Birdwatch co-ordinator Narinder Heyer.

Kerita (Gatamaiyu) forest is part of the Kikuyu Escarpment Forest, an Important Bird Area that forms the southern extension of the Aberdares forest. It lies 48 km north of Nairobi in Lari Division. The Nairobi-Nakuru highway forms its western border, with a thin strip of forest extending and running parallel to the road from Kijabe to Uplands forest. To the east the forest extends to Kagwe and Nyaduma locations. On the northern side, the forest joins the Kinale forest which together with Kieni, Kamae and Raggia forests form the Kikuyu forest block, estimated to be over 38,000 ha.

Due to the large size of the forest, KENVO members divided themselves into three groups and selected a few forest sub-blocks within Kinale, Kerita and Uplands for the bird-watching.

On 2 October, the sub-groups were each assigned a forest sub-block to bird under a more experienced birdwatcher. The areas covered were Kijabe forest and Bathi dam, Kerita/Kambaa and Manguo swamp. After a long day walking, all the groups converged at Gatamaiyu fishing camp where they put up for night. The camping was fabulous. The members chased their fatigue with folk tales and songs round the fire.

Paradise
Flycatcher



They had the chance to recap the day's activities as well as planning for the following day. They could not avoid the fun of making their food in the forest in the middle of the night. Indeed several members wished 'if only the night was longer...'.

The next day everyone was up by six ready for birding. There were no divisions this time: everyone covered a single block, Gatamaiyu.

The exercise was lovely and KENVO registers its appreciation for being considered to participate. We would like to thank the Nature Kenya through the Sites Conservation Officer and WBW coordinator for the support and made sure no needy members missed the 'millenium WBW'. — *David Kuria, KENVO, P O Box Matathia, Kenya, e: davekenvo@hotmail.com*

...at Nakuru

On the biggest days of the year for birders, the World Birdwatch weekend of 2–3 October, the Friends of Nakuru were able to visit various bird watching sites within Nakuru town.

Our first stops were the Bahati and Ndondori forests. Bahati is situated about 26 km from Nakuru town whereas the Ndondori forest is approximately 30 km in the opposite direction. Both support dry highland forest on loamy soils, with the Chania River flow-

ing through Bahati forest. They are great sites for bird watching.

Come back to Nakuru town and travel to Langelanga. On your way to the sewage works is a dam named Hamerkop. It is situated south-west from the town centre, about 6 km away. I named it Hamerkop because that is the first bird I saw there!

During the World Birdwatch weekend the dam was approximately 60 metres on each side, but it enlarges in rainy periods. It was first formed during the El Niño rains and seems originally to have been a quarry.

Come to the interesting part: Pied Wagtails shaking their tails, Spurwinged Plovers clicking *kick-k-kick-k-k-k-k...* I managed to identify 16 different species here but there could have been more.

I do see the need to protect and conserve our environment for the good of our birds. It is of great importance that we in our club are enlightened and motivated to deal with bird conservation issues.

During this weekend I discovered birdwatching as one of the most interesting, adventurous and educational activities I have ever taken part in and I am proud of it. — *Moses Mwangi, Friends of Nakuru, c/o Hyrax Hill Museum, P O Box 2183, Nakuru*

...and on the north coast

Ten minutes to five in the morning and the alarm's going off — why on earth is it set for THIS time? Hang on... that's a Water Thick-knee calling off in the distance. NICE! That's a first for Turtle Bay. Oh yes — *that's* why the alarm's gone off! Of course, it's World

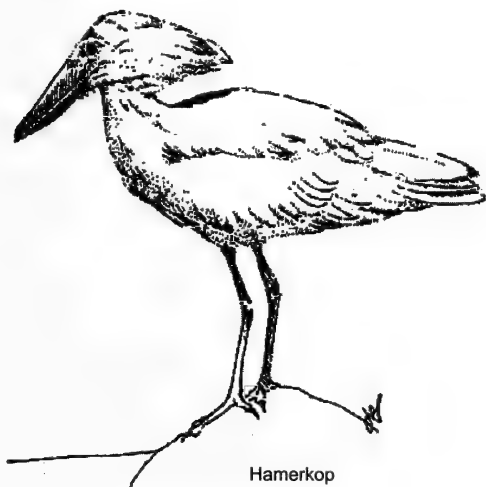
Birdwatch '99 and that's a pretty neat bird to start off with!!

And so it began. I had arranged (or thought I had — !) to meet Yassin at the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest Station at 5:30 am, so grabbed a glass of passion fruit juice from the dining room, filled my water bottle and headed for Gede. It was still dark when I arrived and there was Yassin — but dressed in his KWS uniform and clearly on duty and therefore not in a position to be dashing off birding anywhere — ah! Looked as though none of the other guides was able to join me immediately either. Oh well, would have to make do without help until Jonathan M is free after lunch and just get on to Lake Chemchem, inland from Malindi, my first port of call. Whilst talking to Yassin an African Goshawk came over calling 'tchip! tchip! tchip!...' — yo! another good one for the list and with Common Drongos waking up too, things were getting going. Lake Chemchem it was then and a fast and furious drive to get there as soon as possible, ignoring the weavers flying over as I knew I'd get those later. Stopped in vain to scan a pool by the road for a crake but ended up giving a lift to a lad and his two kid brothers — "*leo ni* World Birdwatch and all around the world today people are watching birds to raise awareness about the importance of conserving them —". I'm not sure if he really got the message or whether it was just yet another '*mad mzungu*' babbling on about something odd that *wazungu* do — if only I'd had one of the guides with me. Still, they appreciated the lift!

Lake Chemchem and about 06:20 now. Not bad timing. Weather a bit overcast, not too muggy, but not a lot of birds calling. Into the gully leading down to the lake, and on the ball for anything moving. A sudden flash of blue accompanied by a high, thin piping snapped off from the bush in front of me — an African Pygmy Kingfisher — yes! Another neat bird, and two minutes later something perched on a bare tree top, a dove of some sort? No! A Little Sparrowhawk casually assessing the new morning — this is going to be good! Push on down through the scrub watching for any of the scrub species — a Bare-eyed Thrush or Black-headed Batis would be nice. No joy on those but a family party of Scaly Babblers were getting going with their raucous babbling and there were the ubiquitous Zanzibar Sombre Greenbuls ('zombies' to some birders!) singing from the tops of bushes and the Black-headed Weavers I'd ignored earlier. I combed the

thickets in search of anything else — Amethyst Sunbird was a nice one to add and in a dense bush near the water's edge a White-browed Robin Chat was letting loose with bursts of song. On nearing the lake shore, something large flopped across the clearing and landed on the outer branches of a big old baobab — something different and definitely interesting! It was a medium-sized raptor with a slight crest, heavy blotching underneath and odd proportions that made me do a double-take to start with before recognising it as a juv Cuckoo Hawk, *another* nice bird!! This was going to be a great day! To the lake itself therefore and a rapid knocking-off of all the waterbirds that it was heaving with including African Pygmy Goose, Southern Pochard, and a bunch of herons, ibises and storks. Nothing unusual except for a swallow perched on a stick out in the middle of the lake which, when grilled through the 'scope, turned out to be an Ethiopian Swallow

— my first for Chemchem. Time was marching on and I had to get going so I followed the edge of the lake around the promontory and out to the patch of reeds where I'd seen Lesser Swamp Warbler before. En route I had good views of Northern Brownbul and Black-bellied Sunbird and as I reached the reeds a burst of scratchy *Acrocephalus* warbler-like song confirmed that the Lesser Swamp Warbler was indeed still there and obviously keen to be added to the list! That was it for Chemchem as it was getting on



Hamerkop

for 9:00 am I'd dipped on the parrot, thrush and batis but got some other goodies and, as I scrambled back up the path towards the car, had an African Green Pigeon give it's squabbling call — yo!

Keeping a sharp eye out on the sky for any raptors (and worth it: a Long-crested Eagle appeared soaring high over the cashew nut trees), I headed for Lake Baratum, slightly further inland from Chemchem and towards the Sabaki River. I needed Great Cormorant and African Darter here and Blue-naped Mousebird in the dry scrub around the lake. It only took ten minutes to stop at the top of the slope, nip down to the point overlooking the lake and scan around; not only did I get those three but a Common Moorhen moseying around the lilies was a nice bonus!

From here I had planned to do some exploring near the river edge. I had once seen from a plane that there was some 'bush' not far from Baratum beside the river and figured it could hold some interesting stuff, so headed off in search of it. Things look a little different from ground level rather than 1,000 feet up, so I wasn't so sure as to where I was going, but nosed my way along a deeply rutted track to where it tailed out next to what was indeed thick bush. Thankfully a path faded off into the bush meaning I wouldn't have to make my own way through the thorns, so I donned my cap, grabbed 'scope, bins and notebook, and made off along the trail. It was now a bit late to get the full blast of bird song and activity so it was

a matter of picking out something new that didn't mind the heat so much, and there wasn't much! The ubiquitous Tropical Boubou was singing, Zanzibar Sombre Greenbul the same... there was not a lot else going on but I figured I should persevere. The path followed the edge of the thick bush with open, cleared bush on the other side containing some patches of long, rank grass. Just as I was beginning to think I'd wasted some precious time here, something small, dinky and with a bright flash of orange zipped out of the grass to my right and shot away to drop into the grass again some 20 m further from the path accompanied by a distinctive 'zeeet' call. What the heck was it? There was nothing for it but to hunt it down, though the chance of seeing it in that grass was pretty dismal. Pushing through the grass I kept a sharp look out for the 'Zeeting Orange Flash' — from its size and behaviour it had to be a small finch or waxbill but I couldn't think of anything around here that looked or sounded like that. 'Zeeeeeet!!' and another flash and it was up and away, this time further off. I managed to get a bit of a look at it however and *yes*, it really was orange on the underparts with a red rump — Zebra Waxbill?? Never heard of it around here before... I hung around in the hope of seeing it again and sure enough, it came zipping back and dropped once more into the long grass. I didn't get to see it on the ground, but had enough views of it in flight to pin it down as a Zebra Waxbill, known at the coast from only a handful of now fairly old records. *Well* worth

the heat and lack of other birds! En route back to the car a thrush of some sort was singing half-heartedly from the middle of a hot bush, a Spotted Morn-ing Thrush — yo! And, hold on! What was that far-carrying, rolling, bubbling call from high up? Eurasian Bee-eaters? Those would be the first of the year and yes, I trace the source of the sound and count eight birds high up over the shambas — the migration is really getting going!

Now that it was hot, the best habitat to go for was wetland, so Lake Jilore on the north-western corner of the forest was my next target. Driving there along the Malindi-Tsavo road I was rewarded with a pair of Trumpeter Hornbills dipping across the trees, showing the white trailing edge to their wings. Nothing else however and I reached Jilore and parked under a big mango tree next to the small bridge. It was midday now, so I stuck my notebook on the roof of the car while I guzzled some water, then extracted the 'scope and camera etc. before climbing out, locking up and heading down to the lake edge some 200 m away — followed by the usual complimentary trail of children. There were a good number of birds there as usual, including five or six hundred White-faced Whistling Duck and a few new species for the day — White-winged Tern, eight Pink-backed Pelican, Three-banded Plovers and a few Barn Swallows. I put my hand in my bag to get out my notebook only to realise that I had foolishly left it on the roof of the car. Some secondary school students who had come down five minutes after

me said they'd seen it there, so I figured it would be safe enough and took some time to show the kids some birds through the 'scope, creating squeals of delight and amazement. It was by now 1:00 pm and time for lunch, so back to the car to get the notebook and continue — but disaster! It wasn't there! I



Crowned
Hornbill

couldn't *believe* that it had been stolen — a half-filled note book, for goodness sake? Worth practically nothing to whoever took it but stuffed with records and information for me that ten million shillings couldn't replace — ARGHHHH!! There was a man on a bike up ahead so I leapt into the car and chased after him only to miss him turn down a side path. I ended up driving some kilometres further on asking everyone I met if they'd seen the book, but to no avail. It had gone. There was nothing for it but to carry on as I was wasting precious birding time, so I headed back eastwards and dived into the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, taking the road that runs through the middle

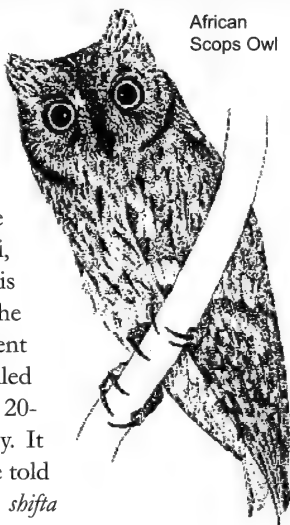
rather than facing the badly churned-up Tsavo road I had used earlier. It also meant that I should be able to pick up a few more species. Sure enough, where I stopped for a bite to eat in the mixed forest I had Eastern Nicator and Black-headed Apalis. Most birds however were sensible enough to be taking a siesta, so it was time to head back to Gede to check on the other groups and meet Jonathan M. Just before leaving the forest there is a slightly open patch, and as I reached it a large bird swooped across and perched near the edge — yes! another good species: Crowned Hornbill and then, even better, a beaut of a Woolly-necked Stork perched nearby! From there it was a short hop to Gede to find Jonathan waiting for me and to learn that all the others were still out and doing well. I took the track past the Nature Trail and plantation into the forest station and wasn't expecting much as it was so hot — but there sitting out in the middle of the recently cleared bit of plantation was a largish bird of prey with heavily barred underparts and a slight crest — it was my *second* African Cuckoo Hawk for the day, an adult this time!

I was on about 130 species by now and we were heading north to look for birds in the drier, denser thorn bush between the Sabaki and Tana Rivers. Jonathan had recently bought a plot at Marereni some 40 km north of Sabaki and we intended to camp here and see what we could find. First though, a quick dash into Watamu to collect a) some camping gear and more water and b) a new notebook (!) — for this we

had to go through Gede village and yes! there they were, the resident Mottled Spinetail for the list! This done it was to Malindi (screeching to a halt en route to pick up a dot in the sky — a Wahlberg's Eagle soaring high overhead) where it was Feral Pigeon and Feral Lovebird to add, in between buying some bread and milk for our supper and breakfast — after all, we were going birding not for luxury camping! We carried on — Long-tailed Fiscal at the site I know for them near Malindi, White-rumped Swift at Sabaki bridge, Lilac-breasted Roller on the telegraph wires, and something else on top of a telephone pole — hang on, that looked interesting, chuck out the anchors and back up — yes! a Bare-eyed Thrush of all things, which I'd dipped on at Chemchem! Just beyond Mambrui is a site where I'd had the rare Superb Starling feeding young on one occasion (rare? Well, at least on the coast it's a bird we get excited about!). Jonathan had bought some toffees to supplement the bread and milk diet and he gave one to me just as we passed Mambrui. We had just slowed right down at the starling site and were keenly chewing toffee and scanning the bushes for them when I noticed that my toffee had developed a crunchy bit... "Interesting toffees these," I thought only to think again and have a look and find half one of my teeth cosily embedded in the toffee — or at least a huge filling! Ah. Now what? Well, it wasn't painful and we still had a whole day to go and what's a crater in a tooth to a birder anyway?! So it was 'Toothless' and Jonathan now who motored on —

and we didn't find the starling, though there were Red-billed Buffalo Weavers.

That wasn't the end of the fun. To cut a long story shortish, it was dusk by the time we reached Marereni, and J. had only been to his shamba once before, and the roads looked a little different then...! As a result we sailed past the track and drove on 20-30 km to real bush country. It looked exciting, but we were told 'Ai! Don't sleep here, *kuna shifita mingi!*' by a lone matatu that rattled past us. It did mean though that we got Collared Pratincole and one of our target bush-country species, Von der Decken's Hornbill. We eventually found a track that kind of headed the right direction, and finally at around 8:30 pm reached a patch of now badly hammered and chopped about woodland some 5-10 km off the tarmac. Here we set up the tent and mosquito net for the night and made some chai. As we were sipping it, there came the sound of a gentle trill — an African Scops Owl — and another, and another — until there were six calling at the same time. There was also the African Wood Owl and then another quiet-ish brief whistle, followed by a short trill — surely it had to be a White-faced Scops Owl! The only way to confirm was to go and find it, so, armed with torch, bins and cassette recorder, we ventured forth along the track the way we'd come shortly before. Not far along it something suddenly



took off from the road in front of us and floated around to land again a bit further on — a nightjar, but which one? A careful approach and keeping the torch steadily on the bird I so nearly caught it, literally about two inches away — arghh! But at least I got a good view and could confirm it as a Slender-tailed Nightjar with the slightly elongated central tail feathers. The gentle whistle and trill was con-

tinuing so we homed in. It took us off the track and through a shamba towards a lone tree that had so far been spared the axe. There wasn't any moonlight but in the light of the stars we could eventually make out a small figure on an exposed branch and when I switched the torch onto it — YES!! It really WAS a White-faced Scops Owl!! Glory!! What a stonker of a bird! We were able to get really close and get crippling views of it and, as a real bonus, make some good recordings of its call. It was then back to camp and to sleep ready for what the next day might bring.

It was just getting light, the African Scops Owl had been calling for a while from before dawn, and it was time to head out and see what we could find of interest in this tiny patch of remaining woodland. It was surprisingly quiet in fact and we saw and heard relatively little — Carmine Bee-eaters overhead, Common Scimitarbill, Narina Trogon

and Black-headed Apalis were the best. We did have a Northern White-crowned Shrike, however, another of the species we were looking for here and then, as we reached camp, a Violet-backed Starling together with a Greater Blue-eared Starling and a black morph of Black-and-white Cuckoo!

VERY nice! We broke camp

and set off back to the main road, now in daylight so we could see where we were going. Not far from the woodland

was a beautiful area of rank grass with *Acacia* and other trees which looked like it should hold some good stuff — but again was peculiarly quiet though we located Siffling Cisticola and Mangrove Kingfisher. On, therefore, back to the tarmac and southwards to find Malindi Pipit just beyond Gongoni before hitting Sabaki. Eyes skywards proved productive again with a Black-chested Snake Eagle for the list a little north of Gongoni. The pipit was a cinch to find as I now knew the place well, having found them breeding there, but the Great Spotted Cuckoo in a low bush near the pipits and Great Sparrowhawk cruising over were a major bonus!

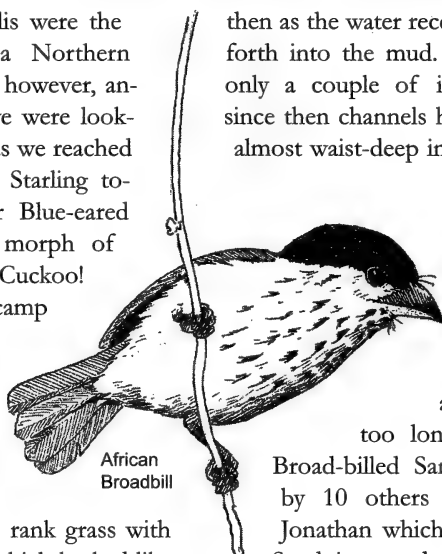
Sabaki at last, but the tide was still right up high and not so good for waders. It was also really hot and windy but we headed out all the same over the dunes to check the back pools first. Saunders's Tern, Black-winged Stilt, Ruff, Sanderling, Lesser Flamingo, Grey Plover were all added pretty fast and

then as the water receded we ventured forth into the mud. Last year it was only a couple of inches deep, but since then channels had been filled to almost waist-deep in places. One had

to step very carefully to avoid sinking...! We reached the main wader-feeding areas and it didn't take

too long to turn up a Broad-billed Sandpiper followed by 10 others — a 'lifer' for Jonathan which was neat. Terek Sandpiper, and a range of terns:

Caspian, Lesser and Greater Crested and more Saunders's and one Ruddy Turnstone made up the tally for the estuary. Nothing exceptionally unusual, but then one can't expect it *every* time! We now had three or four hours of daylight left to play with and were still going strong though I'm not sure Jonathan knew what had hit him with this 'manic birding' lark! The plan was now to head to Arabuko Swamp on the northern edge of the forest. A team had visited the previous day but we would check it out in case something had come in overnight. It was definitely a good decision for, as we reached the water's edge, a Martial Eagle cruised overhead being mobbed by an African Harrier Hawk who then got hammered by the Martial! It was joined a few minutes later by a second Martial and the two of them circled lazily in the sky before drifting off eastwards. A careful



scan of the water turned up a couple of Southern Pochard, a species that is not meant to occur very much at the coast but which we've had around in small numbers ever since El Niño. Also added was a small flock of Black-bellied Starlings that chased over the trees just behind us, and some Black-and-white Mannikins popped up in the shamba beside the pool — both species we'd missed so far. It was slowing down a bit so we thought we'd head last of all for the 'African Broadbill Site' at the end of the Elephant Track in the forest in the hopes of adding that and a few more forest species to our tally. As we turned up the track away from the water back to the car another, smaller raptor appeared overhead giving cracking views of its buffy russet underparts as it hovered not far away — a beaut of a juvenile Ayre's Hawk Eagle — YO!

So finally into the forest for the last few minutes of daylight. Halfway there, we met the minibus donated by Turtle Bay Beach Club for the weekend, with

one of the Forest Guide teams led by Alex on their way back from Jilore, having had a great time it seemed. Just 300 m before we met them, a Peter's Twinspot zipped up off the track in front of us and ducked into the wall of forest undergrowth beside the road. A *fine* species to have at this time of day! What a day, what a weekend — and it still wasn't over! The end of the Elephant Track can be quiet sometimes but today it wasn't — we got there and moved slowly down a few hundred metres, finding Fischer's and Tiny Greenbul, Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, Red-capped Robin Chat, and East Coast Akalat one after the other and then, just as it was getting dark— YES! there it was, the unmistakable 'brrrrrrrp!' of an African Broadbill trilling its wings in display. WHAT a way to finish and what a stonking bird to be our species no. 208 for the weekend. — *Colin Jackson, Mwamba Bird Observatory, P O Box 383, Watamu.*

BirdLife International

Successful BirdLife International World Conference

The Malaysian Nature Society (MNS), BirdLife's Partner in Malaysia, generously hosted the BirdLife Global Partnership meeting and World Conference in October 1999.

These events brought together nearly 500 people from more than 100 countries with the aim of exchanging experience, skills and resources on conserving birds and to agree upon a set of pro-

grammes for the BirdLife network over the next four years. This programme is outlined in the new strategy, BirdLife 2000.

Workshops were held on conservation issues including birds as indicators, bird trade, protected areas and IBAs and a series of discussion groups relating to funding the BirdLife Programme. During the World Conference there were several symposia including ones on 'Birds, biodiversity and people', and

'Birds as barometers of environmental change'. Nature Kenya was intensively involved in this work — Paul Matiku (Network and Advocacy Manager), Solomon Mwangi (Sites Conservation Officer) and Shriti Rajani (Executive Officer) all co-convened workshops, and Leon Bennun (NK Chairman) gave a symposium presentation on Important Bird Areas for biodiversity conservation.

Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan, Honorary President of BirdLife attended the events. As well as chairing one of the symposia, she gave two keynote addresses and led a press conference announcing new figures on the state of the world's birds.

An exciting event was the Conservation Fair where more than 88 organisations involved in the BirdLife Partnership hosted stands showing examples of their conservation work.

The principal external sponsor of the event was the Japanese Fund for the Global Environment, and other major sponsors were the Swedish International Development Agency and the Danish Co-operation for Environment and Development.

The meeting venue, the Awana Hotel, lies in the Genting Highlands a little north of Kuala Lumpur. The hotel is surrounded by fragments of sub-montane forest, and in between the heavy schedule of meetings there was a chance to become acquainted with some of the wonderful forest avifauna of south-east Asia. Spectacular and colourful fruit pigeons, malkohas, hornbills, tree-swifts, Asian barbets, woodpeckers, minivets, nuthatches,

whistling-thrushes, flowerpeckers and spiderhunters abounded, and certainly left participants with a taste for seeing more!

Penguins in peril

In the early hours of 23 June 2000 the iron ore carrier *Treasure* sank in South African waters off the Western Cape, approximately 20 km north of the important African Penguin colony on Robben Island and about 40 km south of the colony on Dassen Island.

Both Robben and Dassen Islands are protected areas and are classified by BirdLife International as Important Bird Areas (IBAs). Robben Island is a World Heritage Site. Between them the islands host about 21,000 breeding pairs, in excess of 50,000 adult African Penguins; some 40% of the world population of the species. June is peak breeding season for African Penguins off western South Africa and it is estimated that perhaps 20,000 chicks were being brooded or fed at these two localities.

The *Treasure* had 1,300 tons of fuel oil on board. Escaped oil began washing ashore on Robben Island on 25 June and had surrounded Dassen Island by 28 June.

RSPB staffer Chris Harbard describes the efforts to clean up and release the oiled birds:

"A massive warehouse in the industrial area of Cape Town is an unlikely place to see thousands of endangered seabirds, but for the African Penguin it is a temporary home that offers a chance for its future survival.

It is difficult to describe the scene as you enter the vast warehouse at Salt River. A pungent fishy aroma assaults you immediately and standing on an observation platform you can get a feel for the enormity of the situation. Hundreds of yellow-clad people are busy around hundreds of blue circular 'swimming pool' containers which stretch into the distance. In every one of these containers huddle dozens of penguins, most of them looking dejected and many still caked in oil. At the entrance of the warehouse a human chain is passing in boxes of fish to a storage area because every one of these penguins has to be fed each day. Ten tons of fish are consumed daily.

This vision of hell is the result of the sinking of the iron ore carrier, *Treasure* which on 22 June 2000 found itself in difficulties and requested entry to port at Cape Town. The port authorities refused as the ship was considered unseaworthy. In the early hours of 23 July, as a tug began to tow it back out to sea, the towrope broke and the boat sank between Robben and Dassen Islands — home to 40 per cent of the world's African penguin population. The boat's fuel tanks ruptured and an estimated 400 tonnes of heavy fuel oil spewed out into the sea, forming large slicks. Thousands of penguins became oiled.

The African Penguin, known also as the Jackass Penguin because of the donkey-like braying noise it makes, was much more plentiful 100 years ago when the population numbered about 1.5 million birds. Now a mere 150,000 birds remain, concentrated on islands

like Robben and Dassen and increasingly vulnerable to oil pollution incidents with so many ships and tankers passing the Cape coastline. Seabirds always suffer when there are oil spills but as penguins cannot fly and spend their time at sea on the surface, they will always get covered in oil when a spill happens near a colony. When oiled they immediately head for the nearest land, in this case the two islands.

The South African National Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB) immediately readied itself for the arrival of the oiled birds. The International Fund for Animal Welfare offered their help at the cleaning centres and hundreds of volunteers were immediately called for to collect and clean the birds.

The main centre at Salt River was a reception area for the oiled birds where they were first cleaned. Initially the birds were given some glucose solution to help rehydrate them and an injection of vitamins. The oil was cleaned off first by mixing it with cooking oil and then using a standard household detergent. Toothbrushes were used to ensure that every feather got cleaned. Birds were then placed under heater lamps to dry them.

As the cleaning process also removes all of the natural oils which make the birds waterproof, they must be given time for this to return. The Table View depot contained pens and pools to which the birds were moved for further washing and monitoring by vets. The sight of these birds being let into a pool of clean water where they can splash

and preen, brings a smile to the face as they clearly enjoy the sensation.

The horrifying statistics make grim reading: more than 500 volunteers were needed to run the operation; about 500–700 birds could be cleaned each day; by 10 July 23,000 birds had been collected for cleaning and 3,000 birds had been fully cleaned; by 12 July the first 500 were ready for release.

Back on the islands there were further problems. How do you stop more penguins getting oiled every time they go out to sea and what do you do with young birds whose parents are being cleaned? The answer was what became the world's biggest ever evacuation of birds.

On Dassen Island the penguins are concentrated at the breeding colonies. Staff from Cape Nature Conservation fenced in these areas to stop birds leaving. The clean penguins could be easily rounded up, placed into transportation boxes and carried to a waiting helicopter, funded by WWF-South Africa. A quick flight to the mainland and they could be transferred to trucks for transportation to a release site about 500 miles away at Port Elizabeth where the clean waters at Algoa Bay are ideal. The swim back takes about three weeks, enough time, it was hoped, to enable all oil to be removed from the area. The whole operation was an incredible struggle involving world experts on oil, salvage, penguin conservation, and bird welfare. Considering that a badly oiled penguin costs R2,000 to clean, 10 tons of fish were consumed each day; each helicopter flight and truck hire is expensive — the final reckoning will run into

tens of millions of rands. The rescue was made only made possible through the generosity of people who gave up time and offered resources. It was a model of international co-operation.”

[The first evacuated penguin, a radio-tagged bird called ‘Peter’, arrived back on Robben Island on 19 July. In mid July, around 20,000 more penguins still remained to clean — a task that was likely to take two months or more.]

First White-winged Flufftail nest found

In the central Ethiopian highlands, recent work at two marshes which hold the only known breeding population of the endangered White-winged Flufftail *Sarothrura ayresi* has resulted in the exciting discovery of the first nest and eggs.

The nest, found by Yirmed Demeke of the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society (BirdLife in Ethiopia) and Barry Taylor of the University of Natal, South Africa, was in a flooded meadow with grass, sedges and buttercups. The globular nest was situated in dense vegetation and was woven of growing grass blades and small sedges with a short side entrance. The three eggs were pure white, like those of other flufftail species. Once discovered, the surroundings were restored to as natural a condition as possible and a visit six days later revealed a full clutch of five eggs.

This long-awaited discovery should facilitate the search for breeding habitat and nests in South Africa, the only other country where this species occurs regularly.



Silvery-cheeked Hornbill

The known global population of White-winged Flufftail is only 750 birds, the majority of which occur in Ethiopia at the two known breeding sites. These sites are located on state-run farms which are about to be privatised. As there is no restriction on the use to which a purchaser may put the properties, there is the danger that the wetlands could be modified or even drained in the near future. Ethiopian Government and NGO personnel are being approached in an effort to alert them to the international importance of the two sites and to lobby for the preservation of their wetland habitat.

Crazy ants threaten Christmas Island's endemic birds

The Yellow Crazy Ant *Anoplolepis gracilipes* is causing major problems for the ecosystem of Australia's Christmas Island and threatening the survival of the five endemic birds found there.

Crazy Ants, so-called because of their frenetic movements, have been accidentally introduced to other islands across the tropics where they have invaded native ecosystems, sometimes

with devastating effects. On Christmas Island the Yellow Crazy Ants are killing the native Red Land Crabs. The crabs feed on leaf litter and the seedlings of rainforest trees, but in areas of high Crazy Ant infestation the crabs are eliminated and dense carpets of seedlings appear, with unknown implications for future forest composition. However, a more obvious impact of Yellow Crazy Ants is their habit of farming sap-sucking scale insects. High infestations of these cause stress to rainforest trees, causing canopy dieback. This could have a pronounced affect on birds like the endemic, vulnerable Abbott's Booby *Papasula abbotti* which nests in the tops of forest trees. Another, more direct impact of the ants is that they actively prey on the native insects and birds living on the island.

The implications of the invasion for Christmas Island are presently unclear, but rapid changes in the habitat, depletion of food resources and interference with nesting, particularly the direct predation of nestlings, must all be bad news for the island's birds.

Records

compiled by Colin Jackson
P O Box 383 Watamu

This section exists for the publication of interesting observations and for updates to *A Bird Atlas of Kenya* (Lewis & Pomeroy, 1989). All contributions are welcomed. If you are sending in records for *Kenya Birds*, please consider the following guidelines. For (non-breeding) records of Afrotropical, oceanic and Palaearctic birds, please send in any observations **with notes** that you think are of interest, e.g. early or late dates for Palaearctic and intra-African migrants, unusual records for your area, or any unusually large or impressive movements of birds. We are keen to publish information of this kind. Records with information other than simply a list of birds are particularly interesting and valuable, e.g. "male singing from bush", or "4 seen in flock of Barn Swallows...", or "single adult and 2 immatures roosting with other terns" etc... The Editors will select records for publication according to the space available. *All* records are useful for supplementing the computerised database of the Bird Atlas held in the Ornithology Department, National Museums of Kenya, through which our knowledge of bird distribution and seasonality in Kenya will be improved.

For breeding records, those of *confirmed* breeding are useful for ALL species, even the most common ones; records of *probable* breeding (nest-building, courtship etc.) are only needed for rare species or ones where there are few breeding records. For definitions of and codes for "confirmed" and "probable breeding", see *Kenya Birds* Vol. 5(2) p. 82. Interesting records will be published here and the others stored by the EANHS for analysis of breeding seasons, success rates, habitat requirements etc. You are strongly urged to fill in a Nest Record Card at the same time. Much more detail

can be recorded on a card, and if your record can be added to the card collection then it has permanent value. Cards can be obtained free of charge from the EANHS Nest Record Scheme Organiser (see back page).

For all records, including breeding records, please be as **detailed as possible** about dates and locations. If you have sightings from places not easily found on the map, please take the trouble to give the latitude and longitude of the site to as much precision as you can (preferably the nearest second of arc or better). We can then use this information as we update *A Bird Atlas of Kenya*.

Supporting details and descriptions are always welcome for unusual records and make publication more likely (see *Kenya Birds* Vol. 4(2), p. 84 for suggestions on how to submit a record). Records of certain species are particularly requested for inclusion in this report. These species are indicated by the codes 'A', 'B' and 'X' in the new *Checklist of the Birds of Kenya* (third edition, 1996; available for KSh 100/= from the Nature Kenya office). Records should be sent to the Records Officer at the Ornithology Department, National Museums of Kenya. For particularly unusual sightings, supporting details (i.e. field notes, photographs, etc.) will be needed for scrutiny by the EANHS Rarities Committee before the record can be accepted.

Key to records

For new atlas records, the species number as given in the atlas is placed in brackets after the name: e.g. Whinchat (A# 653). The new records themselves are indicated in square brackets. Codes are: **pres**, present (first

record); **post pres**, present (first post-1970 record); **prob**, probable breeding; **conf**, confirmed breeding; **post conf**, confirmed breeding (first since 1970); e.g. [conf 25B] indicates that the species is confirmed as breeding (and is therefore also present) in square 25B. All records are from 1997 unless otherwise indicated. Where scientific names are not stated (here and elsewhere in *Kenya Birds*) the English names follow the *Checklist of the Birds of Kenya* (3rd edition), EANHS, Nairobi 1996.

Overview

This report covers a relatively long period, with most records from 1999 up to October and a few from 1998. One or two are particularly interesting older records. World Birdwatch '99 records from October were so profuse that they will be published together in the next edition of *Kenya Birds*. One of the outstanding features of the report yet again is the number of new Atlas records for even some common species — leaving no doubt that there is still a lot to be discovered about the distribution and status of our birds in Kenya: keep sending in your records! Especially interesting have been records from areas that are rarely visited by birders, and therefore have poor coverage, such as Wenje (breeding **Saddle-billed Stork** and **Red-necked Falcons**) and Kipini on the Tana River, and the Nguruman escarpment (**Schalow's Turaco** and **Grey-crested Helmet-shrikes**). Meru has become a focus of birding attention ('manic birding'?) over the past year and a large number of new and interesting records have been reported from there, including range extensions. **Swallow-tailed Kite**, **Banded Snake Eagle**,

Peter's Twinspot, **Grey-olive Greenbul**, **Yellow-bellied Greenbul**, **Ashy Flycatcher** are just some of these and more are being discovered on almost every visit. Some serious birding on Rukinga Ranch and Mt Kasigau near Tsavo East and the Taita Hills has resulted in a lot of new records for QSD 101D. **Bat Hawk**, **Ovambo Sparrowhawk**, **African Hobby**, **Common Button Quail**, **Freckled Nightjar**, **Pallid Honeyguide** and **Striped Pipit** stand out as some of the most interesting species, the sparrowhawk and pipit being the most restricted and uncommon. The Mt Kasigau records stem from an expedition that was made there specifically to survey the birds of this poorly-known mountain.

There are of course a number of globally and regionally threatened species in Kenya and it is always good to receive records of these birds. The remarkable 19 **Great Crested Grebe** on Elmenteita in Jan '99, with the earlier reports of juveniles amongst them, and the site for **Hinde's Babbler** on a coffee estate near Thika are both good news. The count of 256 **African Darters** on the coast is encouraging for a species that is classed as 'Regionally Vulnerable' on the Regional Red Data List especially as it has significantly declined in numbers in Kenya over the past 10–15 years. Both this species and the grebe are threatened by the increase in gill-net fishing in the water bodies where they survive. **African Finfoot** is another Regionally Vulnerable species, reported this time from three widely spaced localities including the Tana River, one of those 'still-to-be-fully-ex-

plored' sites... **Lesser Flamingo** are threatened due to their restricted nesting sites and habitat, so the records from Dandora Ponds and Sabaki River Mouth are interesting and possibly suggest that their normal, preferred feeding areas might not be in such good shape?

The **White-tailed Tropicbird** seen offshore Watamu is one of those species that any land-locked birder surely dreams of seeing. If you talk to the fishermen who go offshore regularly (every day!), they report seeing this and other pelagic species more often than the literature might suggest. However, try spending a day at sea yourself and all too often you draw an almost total blank... just how much Tusker do fishermen drink?! Having said, that the **Eurasian Scops Owl** that decided to hitch a lift on a deep-sea fishing boat in Oct '99 was too close to be mistaken for anything else and is one of those bizarre records that will get discussed by birders on more than one occasion! Also unusual was the **Fox Kestrel** that

was found going to roost on a highland cliff surrounded by forest — very different to the usual arid-country habitat it is normally found in. A small number of this species has also apparently decided they like Lake Nakuru NP and taken up residence on the cliffs at its southern end. It would seem that birders no longer have to trek to Lokichogio to tick this beautiful falcon! The **Pygmy Sunbird** in Shaba Game Reserve is a very interesting observation for a rare species that is really Ugandan/Sudanese in range. Another northern species, the **Abyssinian Roller**, put in a more southerly appearance on Menengai just north of Nakuru town — a dazzling species that again, every birder surely aches to see!

Palaearctic migrant records were relatively few over this period, the most interesting being the owl already mentioned and the stunning migration of around 2,000 **Amur Falcons** through Tsavo West NP, along with a scattering of other migrant falcons. **Tufted Duck**

seemed to show a slight influx over the 98/99 season and **Honey Buzzards** were also well represented — it might be that this latter spe-



African Darter

cies has been somewhat overlooked in the past. The inland records of **Bar-tailed Godwit** are unusual and conversely the **Barred Warbler** ringed in Watamu is not so common on the coast. Very few records of early arriving migrants were submitted, the **Common Rock Thrush** in Meru on 1 October being the most interesting one. It would be good to receive more records of early arriving and late departing migrants, so please let us have them!

Finally, there were a number of rare breeding records — rare in that the species is hardly ever observed breeding even though it might be regularly seen.

The **African Snipe** nest at Lake Ol'Bolossat was located during an intensive study of this species; the **Greater Painted-snipe** records are only the second and third confirmed-breeding atlas square records in 30 years and the **Common Button Quail** nest at Baringo was found through an experienced nest hunter's dedication. The one other very notable breeding record is of the **Spotted Creeper**, more so in that it is from a location other than the well-known Sirikwa one, though in the same general area — another site for 'twitchers' to try!

Afrotropical species

(Records are from 1999 unless indicated.)

Great Crested Grebe: 8+ with at least 2 juvs, south end of L. Elmenteita, 6–12/12/98, FN; 19 on L. Elmenteita, 23/1, NWC; — an exceptional number on Elmenteita for a species that has drastically declined over the last 10–15 years.

Black-necked Grebe: 300+ on L. Elmenteita, 6–12/12/98, FN

Little Grebe (A# 2): [pres 101D] Rukinga Ranch, Voi, 7–8/7/98, FK, ES; [pres 88D] Amboseli NP, 19/10, SP *et al.*

Audubon's Shearwater: 1 c. 5 km off Watamu, 20/10, MM

White-tailed Tropicbird: single adult with full tail streamers watched for c. 15 min over and around boat, 10–15 km offshore from Watamu, 7/1, LP — a beautiful pelagic species that is said to be seen fairly often, but rarely actually reported.

Long-tailed Cormorant: swimming and diving in shallow water over old reef, Bamburi Beach, 12/2, FN — this species is not commonly seen in sea water.

African Darter: 30+ in small groups including imms, Tana River Delta, 25–30/10/98, FN, KNd; Githumbwini Estate, Thika, 17/1, PLO; Windsor Golf & Country Club, Nbi, 7/2, PK & SP; NNP, 11/2, JS *et al.*; 1 pair at Hyena Dam, NNP, 30/1, SE & WE; Misasara Farm, Kiambu, 18/4, PLO; count of 256 on L. Jilore, ASF, 7/3, CJ, JD, TJB — the last is an exceptional number of darters on one relatively small patch of water.

Frigatebird sp. (probably Greater): single female circling above the beach and adjacent scrub, Watamu 25/12/98, JI

Little Bittern (A# 26): single bird, Loresho Ridge, Univ. of Nbi, 4/10/98, FN; Githumbwini Estate, Thika, 17/1, PLO; 1 ad race *payesii*, Burch's Camp, Naivasha, 5/2, SE & SC; [pres 37A] Luwus pond, between Marich Pass & Nasolot NR, 4/4, Nature Kenya members.

Dwarf Bittern (A# 27): [pres 88D] Kimana Wildlife Sanctuary, Kimana, 17–19/10/98, MA, SP, BrW; single individual, City Park, Nbi, 15/11/98, FN; 1 in plain view for about

- 1 hr, 27/12/98, Ngulia, Tsavo W. NP, JJ; ad. responded to call, ASF, frog ponds, 3/1, SE, WE — this rare Afrotropical migrant heron has been recorded at Ngulia previously having been attracted to the lodge lights at night.
- Little Egret (A# 35):** [pres 88B] Kibwezi, 10/98, LF; 350 at Usengi, L. Victoria, Siaya, 16/7, MM
- Western Reef Heron:** flock of four, L. Magadi, 31/1, FK, JM, SP, JO — this species is uncommon inland so to have four together is very unusual.
- Black Heron (A# 37):** [pres 26B] Loyangalani, L. Turkana lake shore, 15/9/98, YA & Sibiloi NP; [pres 91A] Tana River Delta, 25–30/10/98, FN, KNd
- Common Squacco Heron (A# 31):** [pres 101D] Rukinga Ranch, Voi, 7–8/7/98, FK, ES
- Green-backed Heron (A# 34):** [pres 101D] Rukinga Ranch, Voi, 7–8/7/98, FK, ES
- Dimorphic Egret:** L. Chemchem, Malindi, 16/1, CJ, JMw, RAM, & again 12/2, CJ, JJ, JD; Shimoni, 31/10/98, SB *et al.* — the status of this species is not fully understood due to the difficulty of separating especially the white form from the Little Egret. The Chemchem records are of note as these are on an inland fresh-water lake and not a marine habitat as is more usual for what we know of the species.
- Yellow-billed Egret (A# 38):** [pres 88B] Hunter's Lodge, Kiboko, 20–21/9/98, DoA, NH, SP, JO
- Great Egret (A# 39):** [pres 37A] Suam River, West Pokot, 19–20/10/98, PH *et al.*; Luwus pond, between Marich Pass & Nasoslot Game Reserve, 4/4, Nature Kenya members.
- Goliath Heron (A# 42):** [post pres 88D] Imbirikani, Loitokitok, 5/10/98, DM
- Black-headed Heron (A# 43):** [pres 91D] Tana River Delta, 25–30/10/98, FN, KNd
- Saddle-billed Stork:** 12+ mostly imms, Tana River Delta, 25–30/10/98, FN, KNd; single bird on 'Whistling Duck Ponds', ASF, Gede, 3/3, AF
- Glossy Ibis (A# 56):** [pres 88B] Kibwezi, 10/98, LF; [pres 102B] L. Chemchem, Malindi, 16/1, CJ, JonM, RAM and again 12/2, L. Chemchem, CJ, JJ, JD; 110 on area flooded by broken sewer, Thika, 24/7, MM — this species is probably more regular on the freshwater wetlands just inland from the coast than was previously thought.
- African Spoonbill (A# 57):** [pres 88D] Kimana Wildlife Sanctuary, Kimana, 17–19/10/98, MA, SP, BrW
- Greater Flamingo:** 3 at Dandora Sewage Works, Nbi, 13/1, NWC — a rarely recorded species around Nairobi.
- Lesser Flamingo (A# 60):** [pres 88D] Kimana, Amboseli NP, 19/10/98, SP *et al.*; over 200, Dandora Sewage Works, Nbi, 13/1, NWC; 3,000 counted at Sabaki River mouth during NWC, 31/1 and 2,500 still present July 99, CJ — this species is basically restricted to the Rift Valley. Both these records are therefore unusual though conditions at Sabaki have clearly become favourable for the flamingos as it would appear the population is more-or-less resident there now.
- White-faced Whistling Duck (A# 62):** [pres 88D] Kimana, Amboseli NP, 19/10, SP *et al.*
- White-backed Duck:** 98 on Limuru ponds, 25/1, SE, BW, SC; 141 counted Arabuko Swamp, ASF, Gede, 27/1, NWC — these are large numbers and both sites have proven to be good for this species
- Knob-billed Duck (A# 66):** [pres 88D] Kimana, Amboseli NP, 19/10/98, SP *et al.*
- Cape Teal (A# 69):** [pres 88D] Kimana, Amboseli NP, 19/10/98, SP *et al.*
- Hottentot Teal (A# 77):** [pres 88D] Kimana, Amboseli NP, 19/10/98, SP *et al.*
- Maccoa Duck:** single bird Dandora Sewage Works, 13/1, NWC; 1 male, Limuru pond, amongst several male Southern Pochard, 25/1, SE, BW, SC
- African Cuckoo Hawk:** a juv. with ad, Loresho Ridge, Nbi, 17/2, WMB; pair, New

Muthaiga, Nbi, 5/4; ad. Madunguni Forest, Kakuyuni, Malindi, Aug. '99, WC, CJ; immature grooming about 15–20m away, later joined by adult, Bahati Forest, Nakuru, 29/8, BC imm beside L. Chemchem and ad in plantation of ASF, 4/10, CJ

Bat Hawk (A# 138): [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE; 2 catching bats, TARDA guest house, Gamba, nr. Minjila, Garsen, 25–30/10/98, FN, KNd

African Swallow-tailed Kite: 1, Meru NP, 21/2, MM; up to 5 in L. Nakuru NP, 22–23/10, and 2 at L. Baringo, 25/10, C&LH

Banded Snake Eagle: 1, Meru NP, 2/10, MM — scarce and very local, this species is even more uncommon in the eastern side of the country.

African Harrier Hawk (A# 94): [post pres 62D] North Kinangop, 4/10/98, LAB

African Marsh Harrier (A# 98): [pres 88D] Amboseli NP, 19/10/98, SP *et al.*; 1 soaring over old rice paddies, Gamba, nr. Minjila, Garsen, 25–30/10/98, FN, KNd; 1 ad, NNP, 26/12/98, SE, WE; 1 juv, Limuru pond, 25/1, SE, BW, SC — the coastal record is of note as this species is not common along the coast.

Grasshopper Buzzard: 1 in valley sitting on the road 27/12/98, Ngulia, JI; another single bird near Mito Andei, Tsavo West NP, 27/11/98, CJ; 4 birds near KWS Training Institute, Naivasha, 20/11, JB, NS — this is

not a common species, and is even more unusual in the Rift Valley.

Mountain Buzzard (A# 116): [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, , 6–8/98, MKE — this is the most easterly record in Kenya and quite isolated but is not entirely surprising in that the species occurs on other 'forest islands' such as Kulal and Chyulu.

African Hawk-Eagle: Kuku FSC, Kimana, Loitokitok, 18/10/98, HH *et al.*

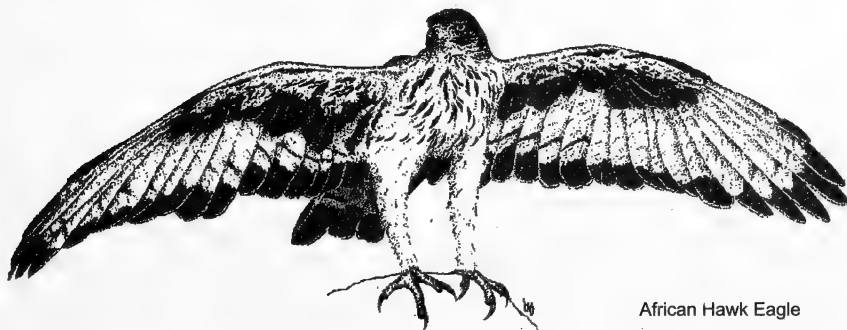
African Goshawk (A# 108): [post pres 51D] Kaaga forest, behind Kemu, Meru, 2/5/98, MR *et al.*; [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE

Shikra (A# 110): [pres 61A] Homa Lime Co., Koru, 31/12/97, NW

Little Sparrowhawk (A# 109): [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE; [post pres 88B] Hunter's Lodge, Kiboko, 20–21/9/98, DA, NH, SP, JO; 1 pair, Sagalla rd 10–13 km from Voi turn off, before Sagalla town, 1/1, SE, WE

Ovambo Sparrowhawk (A# 105): [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE

Great Sparrowhawk (A# 104): [pres 88D] Kuku FSC, Kimana, Amboseli NP, 17–20/10/98, SP *et al.*; [post pres 51D] Kaaga forest, behind Kemu, Meru, 2/5/98, MR *et al.* — the Kimana record is quite isolated for this species though it is found on the slopes of Kilimanjaro.



African Hawk-Eagle

Lizard Buzzard (A# 115): [pres 101D] Rukinga Ranch, Voi, 7–8/7/98, FK, ES; Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE

Taita Falcon (A# 145): [pres 52C] single observed at Elsa's Kopje, Meru NP, 3/10, MM — this rare falcon is little known and this is a new site for the species.

African Hobby (A# 151): [pres 101D] Rukinga Ranch, Voi, 7–8/7/98, FK, ES — this is a good record for this uncommon and mostly western species.

Greater Kestrel: Longonot–Naivasha road, 10/2, JS, HH & SP

Fox Kestrel (A# 157): [pres 62B] 1 flew in to roost on sheer cliff face, Karura Falls, Aberdares NP, at 17.45 hrs, 30/12/98, MM — this is a very odd record in the highlands for a species that is known as a bird of arid and semi-arid country. There is also a small number that have apparently taken up residence along the cliffs in the southern end of L. Nakuru NP, having now been seen there regularly over a period of a year or more (BF).

Blue Quail: 1 flushed twice from rough marshy ground in coffee estate west of Thika, 2/1, MM, JJ — cf. article in *Kenya Birds* 7; a single male, Mungatsi, 17/7, MM — this species was once recorded far more often than it is today, making these two records particularly interesting. Record submitted to Rarities Committee.

Common Button-quail (A# 181): [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE; Rukinga Ranch, Voi, 10/98, FK, ES

Buff-spotted Flufftail: Kakamega Forest, 15–16/10/98, DM *et al.*

African Water Rail (A# 190): [post pres 63C] Githumbwini Estate, Thika, 9/8, PLO

Baillon's Crane: single on 5/7/98 & 1 ad and 1 juv at Endashant swamp on 9/7/98, MM — as with most rallids, a secretive and rarely reported species; there was no evidence of local breeding however.

Striped Crane: 4 flushed Endashant swamp, 9/7/98, MM — a scarce intra-African migrant with possibly a small breeding population — there have only been a handful of records from Kenya, so four together is particularly notable.

Allen's Gallinule (A# 199): [pres 37A] single bird feeding along edge of swamp, base of Marich pass road in very swampy area, 23/12, SE, WE, MS; up to 8 observed during Jan–Mar '99, Arabuko Swamp, ASF, CJ, ASFGA; Sabaki River, Malindi, 22–25/7, TS, FGG; many fully fledged juvs seen, "clap your hands & hundreds took to a long flight over the reeds", many old nests seen, Kampi ya Samaki, 4/7 JC.

Purple Swampphen (A# 198): [pres 102B] single bird on Arabuko Swamp, 30/1, MR and again 11/2, CJ — this record is well out of range for the species which tends to be found on inland waters being rare on the coast.

Red-knobbed Coot (A# 197): [pres 88B] Kibwezi, 10/98, LF — this record is relatively isolated but not entirely surprising as the species is known to move extensively.

Grey Crowned Crane: about 140 birds, Delamere Estate, Naivasha 6/2, FN

African Finfoot (A# 202): [pres 91C] Ozi, Tana River Delta, 25–30/10/98, WK; single bird, few sightings, Naro Moru River, Nanyuki, 25/1, JM — Naro Moru is one of the better known sites to find this uncommon and secretive species; 1 at Kindani river camp, just outside western border of Meru NP, 20/2, MM

Kori Bustard: 6 birds, Amboseli NP, 26/7/98, WV

Hartlaub's Bustard (A# 204): [pres 101D] Rukinga Ranch, Voi, 10/98, FK, ES

Lesser Jacana (A# 212): [pres 102B] single bird first seen 9/1 on Arabuko Swamp, ASF, and later seen irregularly through the year, CJ, ASFGA — this has become a good site to find this elusive and little-known bird.

Long-toed Plover (A# 215): [pres 50C] Lake Solai, 25/2, FN

- Spur-wing Plover (A# 218):** [pres 60C] the common plover along the lake shore, sewage treatment works, and edges of Ondago Swamp, Homa Bay town near Kendu Bay, 3–4/5, FN — this species has shown a remarkable expansion in range over the past decade, now being quite common in areas where it never used to occur.
- Black-headed Plover (A# 219):** [post pres 37B] S Turkana NR, 6/4, Nature Kenya members
- African Green Pigeon (A# 340):** [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga,, 6–8/98, MKE.
- Tambourine Dove (A# 335):** [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga,, 6–8/98, MKE.
- Emerald-spotted Wood Dove (A# 337):** [pres 37B] S Turkana NR, 6/4, Nature Kenya members.
- Olive Pigeon:** River Ndareta, Nguruman Escarpment, 11/12/98, LN; NMK grounds, Nbi, 13/7/98, LAB, SP, SMw — a highland species that is not often recorded in Nbi.
- Red-headed Lovebird:** [pres 48C] 1 pair, Sio River, Mumias, 21/12/98, SE, WE — a very restricted species in Kenya, found only around Busia and along the Uganda border.
- Schalow's Turaco (A# 356):** [post pres 74D] a single bird observed several times feeding in fruiting trees, River Ndareta, Nguruman Escarpment, 11/12/98, LN — this record is from a population on higher ground thought possibly to be separate from those lower down to the north-west in the Mara region. Previously considered conspecific with Livingstone's Turaco of southern Africa.
- Hartlaub's Turaco:** River Ndareta, Nguruman Escarpment, 11/12/98, LN; flock of 8, Naivasha, 17/7/98, ZM; group of 25+ calling persistently and raucously in canopy of forest, Race Course Forest, Nbi, 11/8, CJ
- Bare-faced Go-away Bird:** River Ndareta, Nguruman Escarpment, 11/12/98, LN — this record is one of the most easterly in Kenya for this not particularly common species.
- Levaillant's Cuckoo:** Kongelai Escarpment, Kapenguria, 26/9/98, HH *et al.*; single black phase bird at Gamba, nr. Minjila, Garsen, 25–30/10/98, FN, KNd — quite a late record for the coast; 1 ad near Mpata Safari Club, top of Ololua escarpment, Masai Mara, 20/12/98; 1 Sagalla Hills, 3km from Sagalla town, 1/1, SE, WE
- Thick-billed Cuckoo (A# 370):** [pres 101A] 1 observed banging insect against branch, pair later seen circling over forest, Fururu forest fragment, Taita Hills, 26/3/98, MG — see *Kenya Birds* 7: 71.
- Black Cuckoo (A# 366):** [pres 62D] Kieni Forest, on road to river on murrum track, 10/12/98, FN; Kaaga forest, behind Kemu, Meru, 2/5/98, MR *et al.*; Marich Pass Field Study Centre, Kapenguria, 5/4, FN, WO, SP
- Red-chested Cuckoo:** Ndara Ranch, Voi, Jan '99, MR — this species is supposedly present in this area during the rains; this individual was recorded in the dry season.
- Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo:** 1 ad Kieni forest, 5+ birds heard calling at dawn & dusk, 24/1, SE, BW, SC — an infrequently seen species, this is a good site for it.
- African Emerald Cuckoo:** [pres 62D] Gatamaiyu Forest, Lari, 3/10/98, P&KP
- Pearl-spotted Owlet:** Kuku FSC, Kimana, Loitokitok, 18/10/98, HH
- African Barred Owlet (A# 390):** [pres 114C] Shimoni, 10/98, M&SH — this local and uncommon species is also easily overlooked due to its obscure nature and preference for dense habitats.
- Freckled Nightjar:** [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE — a local and uncommon resident, this species is known from the nearby Taita Hills.
- Plain Nightjar (A# 402):** [pres 91A] 1 on road at Gamba, nr. Minjila, Garsen, 25–30/10/98, FN, KNd; ad female ringed, *Brachystegia* woodland, Nature Reserve, ASF, 6/1, CJ, TJB — one of our Afrotropical

migrants from the northern tropics and still poorly known.

Dusky Nightjar (A# 400): [post pres 74A] 1 ad in bushed grassland, Siana Springs tented camp, 18/12/98, SE, WE; 1 at Mwea National Reserve, 20/2, SE, BW

Slender-tailed Nightjar (A# 406): [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE

Nyanza Swift (A# 421): [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE — this is the most easterly record for this species though it has been recorded on Taita Hills and in Tsavo on odd occasions.

Forbes-Watson's Swift: 400–500 in loose flock fairly high over *Cynometra* forest of ASF, Jilore, just before dusk with several coming down low over trees sometimes calling at same time, 4/12/98, CJ, also 20–30 over Sand Quarry Pools, ASF, 18/12, CJ, JJ

White-rumped Swift (A# 422): [pres 114C] Shimoni, 31/10/98, SB *et al.*

Narina Trogon (A# 428) [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE; [pres 88B] Kibwezi, 10/98, LF

African Pygmy Kingfisher (A# 435): [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE

Abyssinian Roller: 3 in low *Acacias*, Turkwell, at Italian irrigation scheme, Sigor, 23/12/98, SE, MS, WE; at least 2 feeding on insects fleeing a grass fire in farmland together with Lilac-breasted Rollers White Storks, Abdim's Storks, Black Kites and Lesser Kestrels, Kabarak, Nakuru-Bogoria rd, 9/1, FN — a stunning, uncommon visitor further S from north-western Kenya: the Kabarak record is particularly noteworthy.

Violet Wood-Hoopoe (A# 460): [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE — another local and uncommon eastern species that is easily confused with Green Wood-Hoopoe and therefore probably overlooked.

Abyssinian Ground Hornbill (A# 468): [pres 37C] Pair with 1 young, Sigor, Kapenguria, 18/9/98, JBa — another uncommon visitor from the north, this being as far S as it reaches.

Hemprich's Hornbill: ad calling from top of an *Acacia*, Kongelai escarpment, 24/12/98, SE, MS, WE

White-eared Barbet: Pair, Meru forest, 20/9, 1 present 1/10, MM

Hairy-breasted Barbet: single bird calling from high canopy, Kakamega Forest, deep in Zimmerman's plot, 27/11/98, SE, WilO, BW — only found in Kakamega in Kenya.

Moustached Green Tinkerbird (A# 492): [pres 62C] 'Trees', Murungaru, N Kinangop, 6/9/98, LAB — the forest in this area has been severely reduced and degraded so it is interesting to find this species still occurring here.

Red-fronted Tinkerbird (A# 493): [pres 37A] Suam River, West Pokot, 19–20/10/98, PH; Marich Pass, 5/4, SP

Red-and-Yellow Barbet: Carnivore PBP, Nbi, 17/3, WMB — this bird must have been a wanderer as it is not a usual Nbi species.

Pallid Honeyguide (A# 505): 2 birds regularly seen singing beside plantation, Gede Forest Station, ASF from July 98 and a further 2 ringed (while 2 still singing) on 30/10/98, CJ; Siana Springs Camp, SE Masai Mara, 12/2, SE, TP; [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rakanga, surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE — this is a fairly widespread species but relatively rare and difficult to locate.

Cassin's Honeybird: 1 ad feeding in canopy at forest edge, Kakamega pump house trail, 22/12/98, SE, WilO — this is an even rarer honeyguide and there have been few recent records.

Wahlberg's Honeybird (A# 509): [pres 101D] Rukinga Ranch, Voi, 10/98, FK, ES; 1, first creek below the Ngong Hills on Magadi rd, 2/5, MM

Bearded Woodpecker (A# 520): [pres 37A] Suam River, West Pokot, 19–20/10/98, PH; Marich Pass FSC, 3/4, Nature Kenya members.

Brown-backed Woodpecker: 1 pair feeding in *Combretum/Terminalia* woodland, Kongelai escarpment, 24/12/98, SE, MS, WE — this species is also regularly seen around Nairobi.

African Broadbill: 1 ad feeding like a woodpecker then resting on open branches, Kakamega Forest, Ikuywa River area, 20/12/98, SE

Grassland Pipit: [post pres 103A] Sabaki River mouth, Malindi, 16/1, CJ, JonM — this is in fact the commoner pipit species at this site but is often taken for the Malindi Pipit.

Striped Pipit (A# 820): [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rakanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE; 1 ad flushed from rocky area, landed in a small bush, Taita hills, Vuria, 31/12/98, SE, WE — both of these are encouraging reports for a species with a very restricted national range and for which we have relatively little information.

Golden Pipit: 3–4 along boundary rd near L. Jilore, ASF, 7/3, CJ, TJB, JD — an uncommon visitor to the coastal strip.

Zanzibar Sombre Greenbul: 1, Del Monte Estate, Thika, 2/1, and 1–2 intermittently from 9/10–28/11 feeding on *Croton* fruits in Thigiri Ridge garden and adjacent Karura forest, Nbi, MM — this species is common at the coast but inland is much harder to find; the Nbi record is particularly unusual.

Grey-olive Greenbul (A# 629): [pres 52C] Kindani river camp, Meru NP, 1 on 20/2, 2 on 22/2, and 1, Kampi ya Nyati, Meru NP, 2/10, MM — this rare and secretive greenbul has been thought to occur 'in Meru' but this is the first substantiated record. The October record confirms its resident status. A note has been written for *Scopus*.

Northern Brownbul (A# 628): [pres 37A] Suam River, West Pokot, 19–20/10/98, PH;

Marich Pass FSC, 3/4, Nature Kenya members.

Yellow-bellied Greenbul (A# 621): [pres 52C] Kindani river camp, Meru NP, 2 on 20/2, 1 on 22/2; 1–2, Meru forest, 19/9, and a single at Kampi ya Nyati, Meru NP, 2/10, MM — a scarce species inland due largely to destruction of its thicket habitat for cultivation.

African Hill Babbler: River Ndareta, Nguruman Escarpment, 11/12/98, LN.

Black-lored Babbler (A# 597): [pres 74C] Sarova-Mara, Masai Mara, 21/8/98, AA

Brown Babbler (A# 602): Suam River, West Pokot, 19–20/10/98, PH; [post pres 37A] Marich Pass FSC, 3/4, Nature Kenya members.

Hinde's Babbler: 1 in *Grevillea/Lantana* hedge at Del Monte Estate near Nanga Estate turning, Thika, 27/12/98; 2 relocated at same site, 2/1, MM — good news to find a new site for one of our threatened endemic species (see the note on p. 9).

Mountain Illadopsis: pair foraging and calling from low within the forest, responded to recording, Ikuywa River crossing, Kakamega Forest, 21/12/98, SE, WilO

Pale-breasted Illadopsis: pair calling in undergrowth at very close range, Kakamega Forest, 29/11/98, SE, WilO, BW

Brown-backed Scrub Robin (A# 657): [post pres 62B] Naro Moru River Lodge, 14/3, SP — the first record for this area in 30 or so years.

Eastern Bearded Scrub Robin (A# 659): [post pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, 6–8/98, MKE. — this is a common coastal species known from only one or two inland sites. It is thought to have declined in this area, this being the first record in nearly 30 years.

Little Rock Thrush (A# 652): [pres 75D] ad at first main bridge, Magadi Rd, 16/1, SE, WE — this is just into the northern edge of the Atlas square, the bird most probably being from the Ngong Hills population.

African Thrush (A# 676): [pres 61A] Homa Lime Co., Koru, 30/11 & 31/12/97, NW

Spotted Ground Thrush: single bird, Nature Trail, ASF, 19/10, MM

Abyssinian Ground Thrush: River Ndareta, Nguruman Escarpment, 11/12/98, LN

African Dusky Flycatcher (A# 782): [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, 6–8/98, MKE

Southern Black Flycatcher (A# 788): [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE

Ashy Flycatcher (A# 758): [post pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, 6–8/98, MKE; [pres 52C] 2 birds at Kampi ya Nyati, Meru NP, 2/10, MM — the Meru record represents a significant range extension north and east for this species.

African Grey Flycatcher (A# 793): [pres 62C] KWSTI grounds, Naivasha, 6–12/12/98, FN

Lead-coloured Flycatcher (A# 787): [pres 37A] Marich Pass FSC, Kapenguria, 5/4, FN, WO, SP, JH — local and uncommon but known to occur in the Marich Pass area; this record would be of the nominate race *plumbeus*.

African Reed Warbler (A# 691): [pres 37C] Saiwa Swamp, Kitale, 29/1/98, CJ, JSt, IM

Brown Woodland Warbler (A# 712): [pres 62C] 'Trees', Murungaru, N Kinangop, 6/9/98, LAB — a species of highland forest habitat, common in the Aberdares (62D), this location is just into square 62C.

Cinnamon Bracken Warbler (A# 684): [post pres 62C] 'Trees', Murungaru, N Kinangop, 6/9/98, LAB — as for the previous species.

African Moustached Warbler (A# 709): [pres 89C] one singing from tops of reeds in the swamp, nr. Ngulia, Tsavo E NP, 27/12/98, JI — this is right on the eastern edge of the species' range.

Wing-snapping Cisticola (A# 717): [pres 62C] 'Trees', Murungaru, N Kinangop, 6/9/98, LAB — a montane grassland species that just 'creeps' into this atlas square.

Yellow-breasted Apalis (A# 750) [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, 6–8/98, MKE.

Red-fronted Warbler (A# 747): [pres 37A] Turkwell, Sigor, 4/4, Nature Kenya members

Red-faced Crombec (A# 771): [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE

Green-capped Eremomela: 1 bird on the main track through ASF, 20/2/89; 4 birds along same track, 5/2/90, DF — these are old records but as the species has not been reported for the past 4–5 years, worth publishing 'for the record'.

Montane White-eye (A# 938): Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE; [pres 74D] River Ndareta, Nguruman escarpment, 11/12/98, LN — the race on Mt Kasigau is the 'Taita White-eye', considered by many as a separate species endemic to Taita and Kasigau.

Yellow White-eye (A# 937): [pres 37A] Suam River, West Pokot, 19–20/10/98, PH

Spotted Creeper: single bird, Cherangani Hills, Kapenguria, 10/9/98, JM — this very restricted species is becoming harder to find as its habitat is being severely reduced.

Black-and-white Flycatcher: single female on 20/2 and pair 21/2, Kindani river camp, Meru NP, MM

Pygmy Batis (A# 800): [pres 101D] Rukinga Ranch, Voi, 10/98, FK, ES

Black-throated Wattle-eye (A# 803): [post pres 62C] 'Trees', Murungaru, N Kinangop, 6/9/98, LAB; [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, 6–8/98, MKE

Grey-crested Helmet-Shrike: group of c. 8, NW side of L. Nakuru 10/1; 6 with at least 1 imm, shore of L. Nakuru nr. Wildlife Clubs Hostel 6/2, FN; [post pres 74D] flock of 3, River Ndareta, Nguruman escarpment, 11/12/98, LN — this threatened species is now being seen fairly regularly in Nakuru NP but there are few properly documented recent records from the Ngurumans.

Northern White-crowned Shrike (A# 874):

[pres 75B] Inyonyori, sw of Olepolos Country Club, Magadi rd, 20/9/98, Nature Kenya-PLO; [pres 91D] Tana River Delta, 25–30/10/98, FN, KNd — the former record is only just inside the atlas square, being within the Rift Valley where the habitat is better for this species.

Pringle's Puffback: 1 in dense bush, Meru NP, 3/10, MM

Grey Cuckoo-Shrike: single bird in mixed feeding party with barbets, sunbirds and weavers, Shimba Hills NP, 22/8, CJ — only once previously recorded here (May 1990) and once on nearby Mrima Hill (Nov 1983), these birds are thought to be wanderers from the population in the Usambara Mts in N Tanzania.

Green-headed Oriole: single bird on 19/2/89; another on 4/2/90; 1 3/2/91 and 1 on 28/1/95; all seen in *Brachystegia* woodland along Kararacha track in ASF, DF — another species that is very infrequently reported from the north coast.

Piapiac: 6, Lake Basin Development Authority farm, Alupe, Busia, 15/7, MM, JJ — this interesting crow is not often reported.

Kenrick's Starling (A# 876): [post pres 51D] 6, Meru Forest, 19/9, 10 there on 20/9 and one on 1/10, MM

Waller's Starling: River Ndareta, Nguruman Escarpment, 11/12/98, LN

Splendid Starling: ad F, Saiwa Swamp NP, 22/12/98, SE, MS, WE — this is a scarce species now which is found in Kenya between Oct and May.

Bronze-tailed Starling: a pair at Kongelai Escarpment, 24/12/98, SE, MS, WE

Rüppell's Long-tailed Starling: single bird in mixed forest just in from main road, Mida entrance, ASF, 8/6, CJ — this species is rare on the coast and is the first record for ASF.

Shelley's Starling (A# 888): 3 birds, 2 in ad plumage, other possibly moulting, 10–15 km before Sala gate, Tsavo East NP, Malindi–Tsavo East road, 5/1, SE, WE; [pres 103A] 3 birds together beside L. Chemchem,

Malindi, 31/1, 20 incl. some with partial juv plumage, L. Chemchem, 12/2; [pres 102B] single bird in scrubland just inland from Turtle Bay Beach Club, Watamu, 17/2; 12 feeding in fruiting tree along Malindi–Sabaki River road, 21/2; CJ — a very interesting species, this bird is an erratic non-breeding visitor from its breeding grounds in Ethiopia and Somalia Aug–March, and has only been reported once previously from the coast (Sept 1978). Having a number of flocks around the Malindi-Watamu area is therefore very unusual. Also reported at that time were flocks of Wattled Starling, an association that has been noted before.

Sharpe's Starling: River Ndareta, Nguruman Escarpment, 11/12/98, LN

Magpie Starling (A# 895): [post pres 91D] flocks widespread, Kipini, Tana River mouth, 25–30/10/98, FN, KNd; 50+ birds, Nasolot NR, West Pokot, 23/12/98, SE, MS, WE

Wattled Starling: flock of over 1,000 at dam, Lewa Downs, Isiolo, 14–15/6/98, WO, MB — this species is known to flock out of the breeding season, but this is a remarkable number.

Yellow-billed Oxpecker (A# 900): [pres 101D] Rukinga Ranch, Voi, 10/98, FK, ES

Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird (A# 906): [pres 37A] Marich Pass FSC, 4/4, Nature Kenya members.

Pygmy Sunbird (A# 903): [pres 51B] a pair including a male in full breeding plumage, Shaba GR, 12/9/98, DKR — this dry-country sunbird is a rare wanderer to Kenya, thought to migrate to northern Somalia from NE Uganda and SE Sudan; there have only been a handful of Kenyan records and this one is an exceptional easterly extension of its Kenyan range.

Violet-breasted Sunbird: 1 moulting male, Gamba, nr. Minjila, Garsen, 25–30/10/98, FN, KNd; at least 5 males and 3 females, near Sabaki River mouth parking area, 4/1, SE, DN, WE

Orange-tufted Sunbird: [pres 48C] 1 pair, Sio river, Busia, foraging low in bushes near river, 21/12/98, SE, WilO, WE — an interesting record of a little-known species.

Beautiful Sunbird (A# 920): [pres 37B] S. Turkana NR, 6/4, Nature Kenya members

Golden-winged Sunbird (A# 926): [pres 37A] Weiwei irrigation scheme, Sigor, Cherangani, 3/4, Nature Kenya members

House Sparrow (A# 992): [pres 91A] Gamba, nr. Minjila, Garsen, 25–30/10/98, FN, KNd

Chestnut Sparrow (A# 994): [pres 101D] Rukinga Ranch, Voi, 10/98, FK, ES

Grey-capped Social Weaver: Metro Cash & Carry, Embakasi, Nbi, 14/7/98, SP

Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver (A# 1003): [pres 37A] Marich airstrip, 4/4, Nature Kenya members

Compact Weaver: pair foraging low in tall grass near papyrus, Lelekwe river crossing, Mumias, 21/12/98, SE, WilO, WE

Little Weaver (A# 957): [post pres 37B] S. Turkana NR, 6/4, Nature Kenya members

Spectacled Weaver (A# 962): [pres 88B] Kibwezi, 10/98, LF

Taveta Golden Weaver (A# 944): [pres 88D]: Kuku FSC, Kimana, Loitokitok, 18/10/98, HH *et al.*

Lesser Masked Weaver (A# 953): [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE

Red-billed Quelea (A# 986): [pres 37B] S. Turkana NR, 6/4, Nature Kenya members; [pres 114C] Shimoni, 10/98, M&SH

Red-headed Quelea: single male seen at close range in same maize field as Black-winged Red Bishops, Nyangwesa on Homa Bay-Kendu Bay rd, 4/5, FN — a species for which there are fairly few recently documented records.

Yellow-crowned Bishop: c. 100 on ground flooded by broken sewer, Thika, 21/7, and 50 on 28/11, MM

Jackson's Widowbird: Loresho Ridge, Nbi, 17/2, WMB

Grey-headed Negrofinch (A# 1005): [post pres 62C] on the way to Eburu, Naivasha 5/7, ZM

Peter's Twinspot (A# 1013): [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE; [pres 52C] a pair, Kampi ya Nyati, Meru NP, 2/10, MM — the first record of this species from the Meru area since the 1930s, when F. Jackson mentions it being there in his book. This is right at the northernmost limit of its Afrotropical range.

Green-backed Twinspot (A# 1014): [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, 6–8/98, MKE — this is quite a widespread species but surprisingly hard to see.

Brown Twinspot: 1 male and 1 juv foraging on ground at the edge of thicket, Lelekwe river crossing, Mumias, 21/12/98, SE, WilO, WE

Jameson's Firefinch (A# 1021): [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE; Rukinga Ranch, Voi, 10/98, FK, ES

Crimson-rumped Waxbill (A# 1031): [post pres 101D]] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE

Black-rumped Waxbill: 1 in drained and cultivated swamp SE of Lake Kanyanboli, Siaya, 16/7, MM, JJ — one of our rarer waxbills that was discovered in Kenya only as recently as 1969.

Black-faced Waxbill (A# 1035): [pres 101D] Rukinga Ranch, Voi, 7–8/7/98, FK, ES

Black-cheeked Waxbill (A# 1035): [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE; Rukinga Ranch, Voi, 10/98, FK & ES; [pres 75B] Inyonyori, sw of Olepolos Country Club, Magadi rd, 20/9/98, Nature Kenya-PLO

Purple Grenadier (A# 1027): [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE; [post pres 37B] S. Turkana NR, 6/4, SP, WO

Zebra Waxbill: 10 in grassland west of Thika, 2/1, MM

African Silverbill (A# 1044): [pres 101D] Mt Kasigau, Rukanga, & surrounding villages, 6–8/98, MKE

Grey-headed Silverbill (A# 1045): [post pres 62C] KSWTI grounds, 6–12/12/98, FN; Green Park Golf Club, Naivasha, 2, ZM; [pres 62A] Lake Elmenteita, 11/12/98, FN

Bronze Mannikin (A# 1041): [pres 37A] Weiwei irrigation scheme, Sigor, 3/4, Nature Kenya members — this is the most northern record in Kenya for this well-known species.

Thick-billed Canary: Nairobi Race Course, Nbi, 15/7/98, WMB

Palaeartic migrants

(Records are from 1999 unless indicated.)

Black Stork: NNP, 6/2, SP *et al.*

Northern Shoveler (A# 78): [pres 61A] Homa Lime Co., Koru, 30/11/97, NW

Tufted Duck (A# 78): 1 female, Limuru Pond, 25/12/98, SE, WE; [pres 51C] Lewa Downs, 14/2, KM — an uncommon migrant duck, this appeared to be a good year for them.

Osprey: [post pres 63C] Bendor Coffee Estate, Thika, 15/11/98, PLO; Githumbwini Estate, Thika, 17/1, PLO

Eurasian Honey Buzzard: [pres 48C] 1 typical ad, Lelekwe river crossing, Mumias, 21/12/98, SE, WE, WilO; 1, Del Monte Estate, Thika, 2/1, MM; 2 typical ads ASF, 5/1, SE, DN, WE; single bird, ASF, 14/2, JJ, DN; 1, Meru NP, 3/10, and 1 over Thigiri Ridge, Nbi, 30/10, MM

Eurasian Marsh Harrier (A# 97): [pres 61A] Homa Lime Co., Koru, 31/12/97, NW

Booted Eagle: Nguruman Escarpment, 11/12/98, LN; pale phase birds in the major falcon movement at Ngulia, Tsavo West NP, 26/11/98 NRG — see under Amur Falcon for more details.

Peregrine Falcon: single bird heading north c.80 m offshore from point of Ras Ngomeni, north of Malindi, 21/3, CJ, JD

Amur Falcon: in the region of probably over 1,500 birds moved through southwards between dawn and 14:30, in flocks of 50–120+, at times ‘peppering’ the sky there being so many; amongst them were a handful of Eurasian Hobbies and at least 1 Lesser Kestrel, Ngulia, Tsavo West NP, 26/11/98,

NRG — Tsavo can be excellent for its migrant raptors, but this is an awesome number of falcons at one time for anywhere in Kenya.

Sooty Falcon: Karura Forest, Nairobi, 24/3, WMB; 2 over Nakuru–Naivasha rd near L. Elmenteita, 10/4, MM

Lesser Kestrel: Kabarak, Nakuru–Bogoria rd, flock of about 20–40, feasting on insects fleeing a grass fire in farmland together with White Storks, Abdim's Storks, Black Kites, Lilac-breasted & Abyssinian Rollers, 9/1, FN

Little Ringed Plover: singles at Nakuru Sewage, Nakuru, 10/1, NWC, and YMCA, Naivasha, 24/1, NWC

Temminck's Stint: YMCA, Naivasha, 24/1, NWC

Curlew Sandpiper (A# 243): [pres 101D] Rukinga Ranch, Voi, 10/98, FK, ES

Broad-billed Sandpiper: Max count of 23 birds, Sabaki River mouth, 31/1, NWC

Black-tailed Godwit: Amboseli NP, 19/10/98, SP *et al.*

Bar-tailed Godwit: a single at L. Elmenteita, 23/1, NWC; 3 birds L. Ol Bolosat, Ol Kalau, 2/2, NWC — mainly a coastal species and never numerous, ‘Barwits’ are an even less common bird inland.

Spotted Redshank: 9 birds all in winter plumage, foraging with Little Stints and Ringed Plovers in wetland, Ahero Rice Scheme, nr Kisumu, 20/12, SE, WE — this is an unusual number of a relatively uncommon species.

Green Sandpiper (A# 262): [pres 101D] Mt. Kasigau & surrounding villages, 6–8/98,

- MKE; Rukinga Ranch, Voi, 10/98, FK, ES; lone bird, Carnivore PBP, Nairobi, 29/8, FN
- Terek Sandpiper (A# 264):** [pres 26B] L. Turkana lake shore, Loyangalani, 15/9/98, YA
- Heuglin's Gull:** [pres 91D] Kipini, Tana River Delta, 25–30/10/98, FN, KNd
- Black-headed Gull:** single first-year bird, Malindi Harbour, 17/1, CJ
- Sandwich Tern:** 3 birds in winter plumage resting on a sand bar, Sabaki river mouth, 4/1, SE, DN — an uncommon migrant tern along the coast, Sabaki is a good place to find them (and many other rarities!)
- Saunders's Tern:** Sabaki River, 22–25/7/98, TS — these will have been 'over-summering' or non-breeding birds.
- Eurasian Cuckoo (A# 368):** [pres 91D] Kipini, Tana River delta, 25–30/10/98, FN, KNd; Kuku FSC, Kimana, Amboseli NP, 17–20/10, SP *et al.*
- Eurasian Scops Owl:** a smallish owl with bright yellow eyes, almost certainly this species, landed on the awning frame of the fishing boat 'Pussycat' and sat there for about 5 minutes, within a metre or two of the skipper, Paul, some 6 km offshore from Watamu, October '99, (reported to CJ). — this is a rare Palearctic migrant owl, but turning up on a boat offshore at this time of the year, it could hardly have been anything else!
- Blue-cheeked Bee-eater:** [pres 51C] Timau, Nanyuki, 2, RoC
- Eurasian Roller:** in just 10 mins, 83 birds seen moving north 50–200 m over *Brachystegia* woodland in a band c.1 km wide, ASF, Gede, 27/3, CJ, JD
- Common House Martin (A# 563):** [pres 75C] Nguruman Escarpment, 11/12/98, LN
- Tree Pipit:** Ngulia, Tsavo West NP, 22/10/98, GCB — a relatively early record for this species.
- Red-throated Pipit:** single bird, Sabaki River mouth, 28/3, CJ
- Yellow Wagtail (A# 830):** [pres 101D] Rukinga Ranch, Voi, 10/98, FK, ES
- White Wagtail:** YMCA, Naivasha, 22/1, NWC
- Common Rock Thrush (A# 651):** Ngulia, Tsavo West NP, 21/10/98, GCB; [pres 37B] South Turkana NR, 6/4, Nature Kenya members; 1, Meru NP, 1/10, MM
- Rufous Bush Chat:** a pair, Dandora Sewage Works, 13/1, NWC
- Common Redstart:** 1 female, flat wooded area on top of Olololoo escarpment, NW Masai Mara GR, 14/2, SE, TP
- Semi-collared Flycatcher:** a single *Ficedula* flycatcher most likely to be this species seen at the Forest Station, Kakamega, 13/12/98, MM
- Spotted Flycatcher (A# 780):** [pres 37A] Weiwei irrigation scheme, Sigor, 3/4, Nature Kenya members
- Icterine Warbler:** 1 bird, Siana Springs camp, SE Masai Mara GR, 12/2, SE, WE, TP — there is known to be a small wintering population of this uncommon species in Mara.
- Barred Warbler (A# 705):** [pres 102B] first-year male ringed, Plot 28, Watamu, 5/3 and one (the same? — no ring noted but right leg not clearly seen) seen in bushes in front of house, 19/3, CJ, JD — an uncommon species on the coast
- Wood Warbler:** 1 bird on 31 January 1993. on main track through ASF Nature Reserve; 31/1/93, DF
- Red-backed Shrike (A# 857):** [pres 37A] Marich Pass FSC, Kapenguria, 5/4, Nature Kenya members
- Eurasian Golden Oriole (A# 573):** Ngulia, Tsavo West NP, 21/10/98, GCB — a relatively early record for this species; Carnivore PBP, 18/11/98, WMB; [pres 37A] Marich Pass FSC, Kapenguria, 3/4, Nature Kenya members

Breeding records

The Nest Record Scheme is really beginning to take off again with a tremendous response from those birders out in the field. A great deal many more contributors have taken part (78 as compared with 50 for the last *Kenya Birds*) and as a result we have an amazing total of 593 nest record cards submitted over the past year or so covering 157 species. The new card seems to be proving itself and we trust that the explanations given in *Kenya Birds* vol. 7 will have helped those who weren't quite sure how to complete a card. Please do give us feedback on the card and/or the explanation — we are keen to improve the system as much as possible to make it more efficient and enjoyable.

All those who submitted over five cards are listed below with the number of cards they completed and returned. Jeffory Coburn certainly has to be commended with an incredible 170 cards submitted — here must be a man who is both dedicated and talented at finding nests! Zachary Methu with 61 cards submitted has also done a fantastic job — but *all* those who contributed are greatly appreciated. Many submitted records of more unusual birds for which we have very little information on their breeding habits. These are particularly interesting to see — though records of common birds are equally valuable!

Jeffory Coburn	170
Zachary Methu	61
Julius Mwangi	29
Neil Wilsher	22
Friends of Nakuru	18

Kimtai Korir	18
Mercy Njeri	16
Fleur Ng'weno	14
Bernard Chege	10
Nick Nalanyia	10
Peter Kamau Mwangi	10
Nature Kenya Wednesday Morning Birdwalk (WMB)	9
Francis Njuguna Kiiru	9
Harvey Croze	9
Ronald Mulwa	9
Andrew Mwangi Waweru	8
Dennie Angwin	8
Bernard Mburu	7
Japheth Mwak	7
Titus Imboma	7
Fidel Kyalo & Edwin Selempo	6
Francis Gitau Nganga	6
James Wainaina Gathitu	6
Shailesh Patel	6

Five and less: Abdi Anti, Alice Mackay, Andy Sprenger, Anthony Wandera, Beth Kiragu, Charles K. Kahihia, Charles M., Dominic Kamau Kimani, Dominic Lopanu, Dorrie Brass, Edwin Selempo, Elizabeth Oluoch, Esther Mwangi, Esther W. Gathitu, Esther Wangui, Faridah Noor *et al.*, Fred Munyekenye, Friends of Kinangop Plateau, Geoffery M. Macharia, Geoffrey Irvine, Graham Fairhurst, Imre Loeffler, Jacktone Akelo, Janet Wood, Julius Arinaitwe, Kariuki Ndag'ang'a, Ken Makori, KWSTI, M. Kioko, Maina Kuria, Marlene Reid, Martin Kahindi, Mary Mwihaki, Michael Maina Macharia, Narinder Heyer, Nature Kenya Pot-luck Outing (PLO), North Lake Bird Trackers, Patrick Gichuki, Patrick M. Karimi, Paul Kirui, Peter Burke, Philip Keter, Rashid A. Malibe, Simon Kiiru Joakim, Simon Makau, South Lake Bird Watchers, Stephen Wamiti, Tom Butynski & David Ngala. Tony Potterton, Trelss McGregor & Wayne Vos.

Blank Nest Record Cards (NRCs) are available upon request (see above) — we have just reprinted a new batch, so supplies are now plentiful. A small note to make concerning completing NRCs — if juveniles are observed being fed by an adults, please note down the *number* of juvenile birds involved under 'young seen, Out nest'.

Records of interest

(Records are from 1999 unless indicated.)

Common Ostrich (A# 1): [post conf 50A] 6 young seen on flood plain, L. Baringo, 30/12/97, JC; 1 male with large nest, Ol Choro Oirua Wildlife Association, NE Mara, 15/10, DA

Great Crested Grebe: ad with several juveniles, southern tip of lake, L. Elmenteita, 11/12/98, FN, also seen 19/1.

Little Grebe: Ads with young recorded in June, Aug and Nov around Nbi, and Sept on L. Naivasha, DA, JC, WMB;

Greater Cormorant: ads courting & mating, 8/98, WMB and large colony of about 8 nests with 1–4 young in each nest, 19/8/98, 3 ad incubating, 14/4, MN, Hillcrest School, Langata, Nbi

Long-tailed Cormorant: 6 nests in *Combretum paniculatum* with ad incubating, 19/8/98, WMB and 6 nests (the same?) with ad incubating, 3 young seen outside nest, 14/4, MN, Hillcrest School, Langata, Nbi

African Darter: 2 young which could just about fly, might have bred at L. Baringo due to flooded *Acacia* woodland, Kampi ya Samaki, L. Baringo, 4/7, JC

Goliath Heron: 5 fledged young on lake shore, Kampi ya Samaki, L. Baringo, 4/7, JC; 2 young in nest near fishing boats, L. Naivasha, 11/98, MMM; 1 young in nest, 9/98, L. Naivasha, RC

Black-headed Heron (A# 43): [conf 100B] over 30 fledged young seen begging for food, 16/7/98, Taveta, FK & ES; [conf

79C] 2 young ones, capable of leaving nest, 27/7/98, Ntuneni, Wenje, Tana River, RAM

Hamerkop: nest complete & ad carrying food, 22/8, Murungaru, North Kinangop, FJK

Saddle-billed Stork: 1 young out of nest alone 2/8/98, 1 young being fed by ad near lake 24/8/98, 1 young flying with ad near lake 1/9/98, Waruro, Wenje, Hola, nr Tana River Primate Reserve, RAM — very good to receive breeding records of one of our less common species of stork.

Marabou Stork (A# 58): [conf 50A] birds at all stages of breeding, 30/12/97 again on 3/7, Kampi ya Samaki, Lake Baringo, JC; [pres conf 61A] 5 nests with eggs being incubated in the town centre, 20/2, Kericho, KK; ad building nest & carrying nesting material, Hunter's Lodge, Kiboko, 20/9, PLO; ad mating, courting and nest building, L. Naivasha, 21/9, JC — this species used only to breed in one or two limited locations but appears to be spreading and breeding in small numbers over a wider range.

Yellow-billed Stork: 3 young begging for food, L. Naivasha, 15/7, ZM

African Spoonbill: 3 nests, ad incubating in two, ad feeding a chick in the third, 19/8, WMB EANHs, and about 10 ad sitting & incubating, with several young out of nest, 14/4, MN, Hillcrest School, Langata, Nbi.

White-backed Duck: pair with 5 ducklings, pond near Thika, 12/7/98 & 3 broods of 3, 3 and 1, Limuru Pond 26/7/98, MM

Red-billed Teal: single ad with 9 young c. 1 week old, 26/9, only 8 chicks 17/10, Lewa Downs, KM

Black-shouldered Kite: 4 recently fledged young near nest, rat & mouse skins and skeletons found in nest, Tarabete, Naivasha, 3/8, ZM

African Cuckoo Hawk: ad with juvenile, Loresho Ridge, 1/2, WMB

African White-backed Vulture: bird seen carrying nesting material, Tsavo East National Park, 4/8, FK — vulture numbers

have suffered in this part of Kenya, so all breeding records are very good news.

African Harrier Hawk (A# 94): [conf 61A] juv begging for food, Kipsamoo, Nandi, 14/4, KK; single juv begging for food out of nest, Green Park GC, Naivasha, 3/6, JuM

African Fish Eagle: 6 active nests reported from Naivasha — an indication of the improvement in breeding success at this well-known site for the species.

Martial Eagle: 4-week old chick in nest being fed by female, NNP, 14/9, MV

Red-necked Falcon (A# 148): [conf 79C] juv being fed by ad, 23/8/98, Ntuneni, Wenje, Tana River, RAM — relatively few breeding records have been reported of this quite elusive and interesting species.

Grey Kestrel (A# 153): [post conf 50A] 2 downy young in nest, continually harassed by Egyptian Geese trying to use the same nest, 15/3, Kampi ya Samaki, L. Baringo, JC — the species is normally considered a 'wanderer' to the Rift Valley, it being more a western species; to have it breeding at this site is therefore particularly interesting.

Crested Francolin (A# 167): [conf 50A] 4 white eggs being incubated, 30/12/97, West Bay, Kampi ya Samaki, L. Baringo, JC; 4 downy young following ad, Tsavo East NP, 4/8, FK

Common Button-quail (A# 181): [conf 50A] 3 eggs being incubated in nest, Kampi ya Samaki, L. Baringo, 1/10/98, JC — a secretive and skulking species and not reported from Baringo for over 25 years.

African Water Rail: 1 young accompanied by adult, Githumbwini Estate, Thika, 9/8/98, PLO

Black Crake (A# 193): [conf 88B] 1 downy with adult out of nest, 20/9, Hunter's Lodge, Kiboko, PLO; [conf 63C] 1 juv accompanied by ad, Githumbwini Estate, 9/8/98, PLO; 2 chicks with ad, Game Ranching Ltd., Athi River, 7/8, TM, WV

Purple Swampphen (A# 198): [post conf 63C] 2 juvs with ad, 17/1, Githumbwini Estate, Thika, PLO; 2 almost fully fledged juvs with parents, L. Baringo Club, 4/7 JC

Lesser Moorhen (A# 200): [conf 76C] 1 juv with feathers in pin found crawling & falling on dam edge vegetation, 14/7 Game Ranching Ltd., Athi River, WV & TM

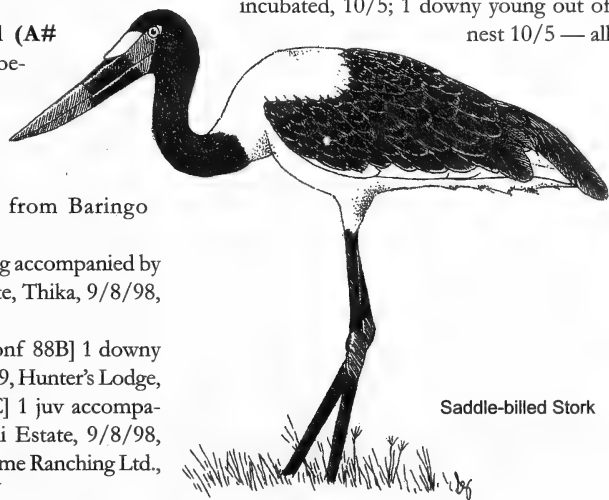
Kori Bustard (A# 209): [conf 50A] 1 almost fully grown juv with ad, Kampi ya Samaki, West Bay, L. Baringo, 10/5, JC

African Jacana (A# 211): [conf 102B] 2 juvs with feathers still in pin, 25/10/98, sand quarry pools, Arabuko Sokoke Forest, Gede, CJ

Greater Painted-snipe (A# 213): 1 almost fully grown young juv with ad, Kampi ya Samaki, West Bay, L. Baringo, 10/5, JC; [conf 88C] 4 juvs of ad size foraging with ad, 1/7, Amboseli NP, WV — being an elusive species there are relatively few breeding records submitted so these are particularly useful.

Water Thick-knee: 2 eggs being incubated, Kampi ya Samaki, West Bay, L. Baringo, 11/5, JC.

Spotted Thick-knee (A# 275): [conf 50A] 2 eggs being incubated 16/3, nest later destroyed by flash floods, 18/3; 1 egg being incubated, 10/5; 1 downy young out of nest 10/5 — all



Saddle-billed Stork

- at Kampi ya Samaki, West Bay, L. Baringo, JC
- Heuglin's Courser:** 5 nests found with eggs and one family of 2 chicks with ad, 3, 5 and 10; Kampi ya Samaki, L. Baringo, JC
- Long-toed Plover (A# 215):** [conf 50A] many feathered young with ad 31/12/97, Kampi ya Samaki, Lake Baringo, JC
- Blacksmith Plover (A# 217):** [conf 50C] 3 eggs in nest, Lake Solai, Solai, 12/7, MKa
- Spur-winged Plover (A# 218):** [conf 51C] 2 young being defended by ad 23/7, Lewa Downs, KM
- Black-headed Plover:** 3 young in nest, 31/12/97; nest with 3 eggs, 17/3 — all at Kampi ya Samaki, L. Baringo, JC
- Crowned Plover (A# 220):** [prob 50A] ad displaying, 30/12/97, West Bay, Kampi ya Samaki, L. Baringo, JC
- African Snipe (A# 250):** [post conf 62A] 1 egg in nest, 2km south of Githunguthu Primary School, L. Ol'Bolossat, 27/7, KN — this is only the third atlas square since 1970 where this secretive species has been recorded as confirmed breeding.
- Black-faced Sandgrouse:** Kampi ya Samaki, L. Baringo, JC; 4 juvs out of nest in front of big bush-fire, 15/7, Tsavo East, ES & FK; 1 juv, few days old, Tsavo East NP, 4/9, FK
- Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse:** ad male sheltering newly hatched young, 17/3; 1 egg in nest, later destroyed by flash floods, 17/3, 2 juvs out of nest, Kampi ya Samaki, West Bay, L. Baringo, 8/5, JC
- Yellow-throated Sandgrouse (A# 322):** [conf 88C] 1 male & fem. With very fluffy chick about one-third grown, 3/8/93, Amboseli NP, DA
- African Green Pigeon:** nest from which 2 young fledged, Ololua ridge, Karen, Nbi, JW
- Emerald-spotted Wood Dove (A# 337):** [conf 62C] 1 egg being incubated in nest; 2 eggs in another nest in another pomegranate tree 12/7, L. Elmenteita, JC
- Speckled Pigeon (A# 324):** [conf 61A] 1 young in nest under metal cover used to protect electronics for satellite dish c. 60 ft up! Homa Lime Co., Koru, 20/11/97, NW
- Red-eyed Dove (A# 330):** [conf 60D] nest with three out of four young successfully fledging, along Migori-Kisii rd. junction to Homa Bay, 20/6–23/7, EO
- African Mourning Dove (A# 329):** [prob 62A] ad mating and building nest, road from Nakuru to L. Baringo, near Nakuru, 25/9, JC
- Feral Lovebird:** ad courting & building nest, 16/3, Kampi ya Samaki, L. Baringo, JC — this escaped cage bird is becoming more and more widespread in Kenya from its main establishment site at L. Naivasha.
- Ross's Turaco (A# 361):** [prob 61A] 2 ad spent 1 week building nest, female sat for 1 week, then not seen again, Homa Lime Co., Koru, 4, NW
- White-bellied Go Away Bird:** 2 chicks in nest and later fledged, 13/10 & 17/10, Lewa Downs, KM
- Klaas's Cuckoo:** successfully parasitised Variable Sunbird nest 20/5–3/6, Upper Hill, Nbi, FN
- Diederik Cuckoo (A# 374):** [conf 61A] young calling to be fed out of nest, Homa Lime Co., Koru, 7/98, NW; 1 feathered young being fed by ad Tawny-flanked Prinia, Kasarani, Naivasha, 26/5, NLB
- White-browed Coucal (A# 377):** [conf 26D] 2 light pink eggs in nest in *Balanites aegyptiaca*, 18/11/97, Kurungu, foot hills of Mount Nyiru, KN
- African Barred Owl:** young heard calling from nest, 5 miles SW of Marafa, NW of Malindi, 15/11/95, TB, DN
- Verreaux's Eagle Owl (A# 387):** [conf 50A] 1 eggs being incubated on old Hamerkop's nest, 5/7, Lake Baringo, JC; [prob 61A] ad seen courting in palm tree, in Dec. seen every day together, Homa Lime Co., Koru, 4/12/97, NW

- African Wood Owl (A# 389):** [post conf 75B] 2 downy young with adult, 23/12, Nbi Race Course, WMB — amazing that this frequently recorded owl has not been reported breeding around Nbi since pre 1970!
- Fiery-necked Nightjar:** 2 eggs in nest, Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, Gede, 18/4, CJ, TJB
- Slender-tailed Nightjar (A# 406):** [post conf 50A] 2 eggs being incubated, 30/12/97; 2 young just hatched 31/12/97; nest with 2 eggs, 8/5; 2 feathered young out of nest, 8/5; 2 downy young out of nest, about 1 week old, 7/5, 1 egg being incubated, 1/10, all at Kampi ya Samaki, West Bay, L. Baringo, JC
- Blue-naped Mousebird (A# 427):** [conf 62C] nest observed from being built to having 2 hatched young, Green Park GC, Naivasha, 14–28/6, ZM
- Hoopoe:** 3 young seen leaving nest, 6/5; 5 naked young in nest, ad seen carrying food, 7/7, Kampi ya Samaki, West Bay, L. Baringo, JC — this is an average size of clutch, some nests containing up to 9 eggs.
- White-headed Wood-hoopoe (A# 461):** [conf 38D] 3 ad seen bringing food items, 1 stays in or around nest and takes food from other 2. Food includes plant bugs, grasshoppers & spiders. Plant bugs most common, 20/4, Leroghi forest, Maralal, KN; young coming out of hollow in tree to be fed by ad, Buyangu, Kakamega Forest, 4/7, NN
- Green Wood-hoopoe (A# 459):** [conf 114A] 2 ads taking food to nest, Mwaluganje Traveller's Camp, Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary, Kwale, 28/12/98, CJ, TJB
- Southern Ground Hornbill:** ad building nest and later feeding young, L. Sonachi, Naivasha, 13/3–30/4, DL; 1 young being fed by ad, 27/9, Kaibibich, Cherangani Hills, HH *et al.*
- Von der Decken's Hornbill (A# 470):** [conf 114A] ad seen taking food to nest hole, Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary, Kwale, 28/12/98, CJ, TJB
- Crowned Hornbill (A# 474):** [conf 79C] 2 young fed by ad with seed & fruit, 5/8, Wenje shopping centre, Wenje, RAM
- Grey-throated Barbet:** 1 young being fed out of nest, Homa Lime Co., Koru, 15/2, NW
- Red-fronted Tinkerbird (A# 493):** [conf 102B] ad feeding young out of nest, 12/2, L. Chemchem, 12/2, CJ, JJ, JD
- Wire-tailed Swallow:** 2 chicks in nest, later watched fledging, Sarova-Mara Camp, Masai Mara, 1–15/8/98, AA
- Ethiopian Swallow (A# 554):** [post conf 51C] nest with 3 eggs observed through to juvs returning to roost after fledging, Lewa Downs, Isiolo, 17/6–13/7, VM
- Angola Swallow:** ad carrying food, Ndunyu Njeru, Kinangop, 3/6, FJK
- Red-rumped Swallow:** ad seen entering nest, 4 & 9/5, 3 eggs in nest, later seen at bottom of tree, broken. One contained a chick, nest taken over by Little Swift which threw out the eggs, Green Park GC, Naivasha, 17/5, ZM
- Rock Martin:** ad entering nest carrying food, 17/1, Murungaru, North Kinangop, AMW
- Sharpe's Longclaw:** nest watched from building through incubation of 2 eggs to fledging, Kirima, North Kinangop, 6–27/6, JWG — one of our threatened Kenyan endemics and always good to receive successful breeding records.
- Yellow-whiskered Greenbul:** single juv being fed by ad in undisturbed part of forest, Karura Forest, Nbi, 21/2, FN — we receive relatively few records of this common forest greenbul.
- Common Bulbul (A# 609):** [conf 102B] a very recently fledged juv. accompanied by 2 ad, 1km W of Turtle Bay Beach Club, Watamu, 13/6, CJ
- Rufous Chatterer:** 3 eggs in a nest in *Bougainvillea* against building, Kampi ya Samaki, L. Baringo, 16/3, JC
- East Coast Akalat:** 1 pair seen building nest which was found on ground near a large rotten log, mainly consisted of large dry brown leaves, ASF, 4/1, SE, DN, WE

Cape Robin Chat: nest with 1 chick which was seen fledging, Murungaru town, Naivasha, 5-21/7, AMW; single chick in nest with addled, unhatched egg, 12/7, Makumi Dam, N. Kinangop, CK; 1 ad feeding 1 young out of nest, 5/1, Aberdare NP, Nyeri, DB

White-browed Robin Chat: ad incubating 2 eggs 10/4, 1st egg taken by Red-chested Cuckoo although unable to lay in the nest, 2nd taken by rat, 20/4, Homa Lime Co., Koru, NW

Stone Chat: 2 young in nest later seen fledged, Kirima, 27/4-3/5, FG; second nest with 2 young later seen fledged and begging from ads, Kirima, North Kinangop, 17-20/6, JWG; 2 fledged young being fed by male, Rocco Farm, Naivasha, 20/6, ZM

Abyssinian Black Wheatear: 2 young in nest, Green Park GC, Naivasha, 22/4, JuM; nest with 3 young successfully fledged, Green Park GC, Naivasha, 7/4-4/5 & same ads building new nest about 20 m away from previous one 4/5 with a further 3 young later seen in nest 25/6, ZM

African Dusky Flycatcher (A# 782): [conf 61A] single juv being fed by ad, Samoei, 20/6, and another at Bear's Club, 29/6, Nandi Hills, KK

Little Rush Warbler: 2 eggs in nest, near Elsamere jetty, L. Naivasha, 11/98, MMM — nests are not often reported for this secretive species

Hunter's Cisticola: ad seen carrying food and agitated near nest, 26/6, nest deserted, 27/6, Kirima, North Kinangop, JWG

Winding Cisticola (A#740): [conf 103A] ad carrying large green grasshopper & calling in agitated way, 9/8, Sabaki River mouth, Malindi, CJ

Tawny-flanked Prinia: ad feeding juv Diederik Cuckoo, Kasarani, Naivasha, 26/5, NLB

Yellow-breasted Apalis (A# 750): [conf 74A] 2 young being fed by ad, 16/8, Masai Mara conservation area, JM — this is a wide-

spread species yet there are relatively few atlas squares where it has been reported breeding

Red-fronted Warbler (A# 747): [conf 101D] ad cautiously approaching nest with food, nest contents not seen, 7/9, Rukinga ranch, Maungu, FK & ES; ad incubating, West Bay, Kampi ya Samaki, L. Baringo, 1/10, JC

Northern Crombec: 1 feathered young in nest, ad carrying food, L. Baringo, 1/10, JC

Red-faced Crombec (A# 771): [conf 76C] ad feeding fully fledged young, 7/9/97, Game Ranching Co., Athi River, WV

Yellow-bellied Eremomela (A# 764): [conf 62C] nest with 1 egg, later deserted with egg absent — depredated? 20-30/5, Green Park GC, Naivasha, ZM; [post conf 50A] 2 incubated eggs, hatching, West Bay, Kampi ya Samaki, L. Baringo, 1/10, JC

Buff-bellied Warbler: 3 eggs in nest, Kampi ya Samaki, West Bay, L. Baringo, 8/5, & 4 naked young in nest, L. Baringo, 1/10, JC

Taita White-eye (A# 938): [post conf 101A] 2 young seen flying day after nest was seen, 6/12/98; 2 young being fed by ad, 13/12/98; Mbololo, Taita Hills, and [conf. 101D] ad carrying food, but very careful not to indicate/show nest to observer, 15/12/98, Mt Kasigau, RM

Yellow White-eye: fledged young begging, ad carrying food, 28/12/98, Mwok's Farm, Churman, Kapenguria, JM

Spotted Creeper: 1 ready to fledge young in nest, ad carrying food, Mwok's Farm, Churman, Kapenguria, 21/1, JM — this is a very encouraging record as this species is extremely local in Kenya; the only other regular site at Sirikwa has been heavily degraded to the extent that the creeper may not survive long there.

Black-headed Batis (A# 798): [conf 102B] ad carrying food to nest, L. Chemchem, Malindi, 12/2, CJ, JJ, JD

Grey-crested Helmet-shrike: juv following two ad, L. Nakuru NP, 6/2, FN, CN

Black Cuckoo-shrike: male chasing female flitting from tree to tree, Tusks Restaurant,

Limuru rd, Nbi, 30/7, EOM — this species is both a resident breeding bird as well as an Afro-tropical migrant. This record suggests the birds observed may have been preparing to breed; the normal breeding season is Mar–Apr or Oct–Dec so this one in July is unusual.

Common Drongo (A# 566): [conf 114A] ad incubating, nr Mwaluganje Traveller's Camp, Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary, Kwale, 28/12, CJ, TJB; single young being fed by both ad, Rocco Farm, Naivasha, 20/6, ZM

Black-headed Oriole (A# 568): [post conf 101D] 1 imm accompanying ad, Kasigau, 20/8, ES; 2 young being fed in *Acacia*, 13/1, Green Park GC, Naivasha, ZM

Greater Blue-eared Starling: 2 young with ad in an old woodpecker's nest, Green Park GC, Naivasha, 12/4, JuM

Hildebrandt's Starling (A# 889): [conf 88C] 1 young being fed amongst several ads, Ol Tukai, Amboseli NP, 3-8/8/93, DA

Superb Starling: 2 young in nest, ad African Harrier Hawk destroyed nest & took 1 chick, while being mobbed by 5 ad Superb Starlings; 20-30 mins. later, Harrier Hawk came back & took the other chick! 4/11/98, Green Park GC, Naivasha, ZM; 2 young in nest being harassed by an Egyptian Vulture, 30/3, Green Park GC, Naivasha, MN

Amani Sunbird: single juv. fed by ad male in canopy, Kararacha, ASF, 9/6/98, CJ; 1 fledgling begging for food, 4/2, in *Brachystegia*, ASF, JD

Collared Sunbird (A# 902): [conf 37C] 2 young being fed by ad out of nest, 25/12/98, Mwok's Farm, Kapenguria, JM

Hunter's Sunbird (A# 931): [conf 51C] 2 young in nest being fed by ad male, 18/10/98, Lewa Downs, KM

Variable Sunbird: pair raised a Klaas's Cuckoo in May-June. As soon as it fledged, other birds stripped the nest of its materials, destroying it. Within a month, built another c. 1 m from the first, incubated for some time, then abandoned it, Upper Hill, Nbi, FN — an interesting piece of behaviour

Purple-banded Sunbird (A# 913): [conf 101D] 1 fledged young begging, Taita Ranch, Maundu, 8/7, FK & ES

Tacazze Sunbird (A# 924): female incubating with male seen agitated nr nest, 26/12/98, Mwok's Farm, Kapenguria, JM; [prob 62A] nest complete, ad seen entering nest 2/5; ad seen leaving nest, contents not seen, 1 & 2/6, Bahati Forest, Nakuru, BC; 2 young in nest, Mbirithi Primary School, North Kinangop, 23/6, FoK — there are relatively few breeding records for this species.

Golden-winged Sunbird: nest with 1 egg 14/6-1/7, Kirima, Kinangop, DKK

House Sparrow (A# 992): fledged young begging for food, Kinamba, Kirati, Naivasha, 2/5, EWG; [conf 60D] nest with 2 young successfully fledged, 20/6-21/7, along Migori-Kisii rd. junction to Homa Bay, Rongo, EO; Nbi breeding records from: June, July, Aug, SP, MN, WMB, DA

Chestnut Sparrow (A# 994): [conf 62C] 1 juv unable to fly well, 2/10/98, Green Park GC, Naivasha, ZM

Yellow-spotted Petronia (A# 995): [conf 26D] a pair of birds entering nest in turns carrying food, 19/11/97, Kurungu, South Horr, KN

Grosbeak Weaver (A# 970): [conf 62C] male & female feeding fledged young, Eburru Forest, Gilgil, 18/7, ZM

Holub's Golden Weaver: 2 young seen leaving nest and being fed by ad 24/12/98, ad building nest, male with NMK ring, 20/3, garden on Karura forest edge, Muthaiga, Nbi, HC — the ringed adult is probably a bird from NMK grounds where Nbi Ringing Group have been actively ringing.

Dark-backed Weaver: ad observed going in & out of nest, Buyangu, Kakamega Forest, 22/7, NN

Red-headed Weaver (A# 969): [conf 61 A] first brood raised 16/11-12/12/97, birds built second nest alongside old one & raised young, Mar–Apr '98; in May '98 built 2 nests finishing 2nd at month end, building breed-

ing May-June, young heard in nest 18/7, Homa Lime Co., Koru, NW; [conf 74C] ad fixing up old nest 13-24/10/98 nest complete, ad entering nest and agitated near nest, 30/10/98, Sarova Mara camp, AA

Grey-headed Negrofinch: ad carrying nesting material over a marshy area, Nandi Tea Estate Ltd., Nandi, 7/7, KK — there are relatively few breeding records for this species and this appears to be the only record for this region over 1800 m.

Yellow-bellied Waxbill: ad carrying food & entering nest 24/12/98, Mwok's Farm, Kapenguria, JM

Yellow-rumped Seedeater (A# 1058): [conf 62C] nest with 3 chicks, Green Park GC, Naivasha, 17/5, JuM; 2 ads feeding 2 juvs, 18/6, nest with 3 young 18/6, 2 fledged leaving 1 to follow, 25/6; 1 juv fed by ad 14-16/9, Green Park GC, Naivasha; ZM

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Abbreviations

ASF — Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, Malindi / Kilifi; FSC — Field Study Centre; GC — Golf Club; KWSTI — Kenya Wildlife Service Training Institute, Naivasha; NP — National Park; NNP — Nairobi National Park; NR — National Reserve; NWC — National Waterfowl Census; PBP — Carnivore Proposed Biodiversity Park, Nairobi; N — north; E — east; S — south; W — west; rd — road; ad — adult; juv — juvenile.

Erratum

Correction to *Kenya Birds* vol. 6, p. 48:

Blacksmith Plover (A# 217):
[pres 62C] Game Ranching
Co., Athi River, 3/4, WV &
TM

The QSD should be 76C, not 62C.
However, this is indeed a new
record.

Request for feathers

I am working on a detailed identification guide to the feathers of European birds. It will illustrate and describe the feathers of nearly all 500 European species up to the Urals and Caucasus on about 800 pages in the format 24 x 34 cm. For each species a full set of primaries, secondaries and tail feathers plus a selection of coverts and body feathers will be shown in colour. For this the feathers are mounted on standardised grey cardboard and scanned in.

The species accounts will be on the facing page of the corresponding illustrations and will describe the feathers in detail. We showed the concept to many ornithologists. They were all enthusiastic because there is no book yet that illustrates so many details of the plumage that are normally hidden to view. There are many areas of application for this book, for example identification of the prey of raptors and identification of bird strike remains after collision with aircraft. The book will be probably published by Lynx Edicions, who are well-known for their respected series 'Handbook of the Birds of the World'.

For most species we can borrow the necessary feathers from museums. Only a few species are still missing. Among them are Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla*, Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus*, Booted Eagle *Hieraetus pennatus*, Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*, Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*, Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* and Olive-tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum*. Since we cannot pluck museum skins for this project, we have to rely on the feathers of birds that are found in bad shape and have no other use or are only needed for their skeletons.

Kenya Birds readers might sometimes find dead specimens of these species on the road or under high-tension wires. If you do, please would you keep the feathers for this project? It would be sufficient to pluck the feathers of both wings and the tail and put them into a paper envelope to dry, if possible together with a few sample feathers from the flanks, back, breast and head. Feathers can be sent through the National Museums of Kenya, Ornithology Department, or directly if that is easier. Thank you! — *Gabriel Hartmann, Station 24, NL-6063 NP Vlodrop, The Netherlands*

Notes

Booted Eagle again at Tudor Creek

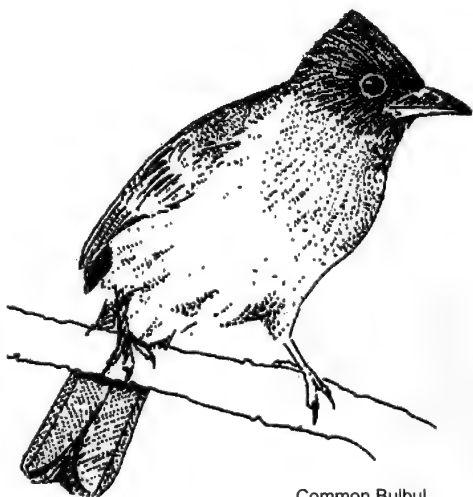
Further to my report of a Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* at Tudor Creek in February 1998, the same bird (I swear) appeared in the same palm tree on the morning of 11 December 1999. It appeared weary and seemed to be trying to warm up or dry its plumage as it flew into nearby trees and spread itself out in the sun with wings fully opened. It stayed in this position for quite some time.

Duty called and I had to leave off observing but on 14 December it was again present at 07:10 h, madly preening before the day's work began. It reappeared again at dusk and flew onto its favourite branch in the same palm and started its rigorous evening preening. 21 December saw it back again rather earlier than usual, carrying a small bird which it proceeded to eat, afterwards scraping its talons with its bill and then carefully cleaning its bill on the palm fronds. Some Pied Crows appeared in the area which is in itself fairly rare. For the next week the eagle was around, usually appearing at dusk and disappearing as soon as the sun got too hot. The Common Bulbuls began to get wind of its presence (probably being its favourite prey) and could usually be relied upon to sound the alert.

On 29 December it appeared, again carrying a small bird in its talons, chased by the Pied Crows. Un-

able to land, it proceeded to eat its prey on the wing but finally managed to land in the palm and finish its meal. The crows were not so easily shaken off however, and the eagle was having some difficulty balancing on its branch due to a very strong wind. Eventually the crows forced it to take off and carried on chasing and harassing it. It was not much bigger than the crows and although a cleverer flier, turning and sometimes flying upside down to evade them, eventually it obviously decided "enough is enough" since it flew off and has not reappeared since. I do hope it got clean away and will return to its favourite perch again.

An interesting note is that though the House Crows occasionally flew menacingly at it, the eagle never seemed



Common Bulbul

much threatened by them. On the few occasions when they did half-heartedly chase it they soon gave up, unlike the Pied Crows which were extremely

tenacious and aggressive. Yet the Pied Crows get chased out of the area again and again by the House Crows. Strange!
— *Marlene Reid, P O Box 80429, Mombasa*

A rescued African Goshawk

It was on 3 January 2000, after all the festivities, and the city was still calm. I was walking along Harambee Avenue in the late afternoon hours when I was attracted by a number of security men. I became curious... and although curiosity killed the cat, this time it saved the African goshawk.

A raptor... an unconscious raptor, which was after its prey when it collided with the Marshalls House wall and fell down. As it was evidently unable to fly I thought it was suffering from concussion. Other indications that the bird was unwell was that it had fluffed its feathers, was breathing in slowly and out fast, had partially closed eyes and was quiet and unresponsive. After parting with KSh 20 which the security men loudly demanded, I wrapped it in my jumper, covering the head as this quietsens the bird and watching out for the talons as they are really dangerous, bearing in

mind that the bird was more frightened than I was so it might be likely to strike.

On reaching home I placed it in a ventilated box that was large enough to allow it to stand comfortably. The following morning I took it to the Ornithology Department at the Museums. It had already regained consciousness. Nicodemus Nalinya, Martin Kahindi, George Eshiamwata and I ringed it as an immature African Goshawk, with ring number 68907 and a red colour band. It weighed 199 grammes, with a wing length of 221 millimetres and the primaries and secondaries slightly worn. Then we released it to go wild!

It was a nice start for the Nairobi Ringing Group, as it was the first bird of the millennium to be ringed. So can we call the African Goshawk a 'millennium bird'? I would love to hear your suggestions! — *Peter Kamau Mwangi, P O Box 41469, Nairobi, Kenya.*

It's getting dark and we've nowhere to sleep...

Bronze Mannikins are so common that we take little notice of them and hardly ever see anything written to celebrate their existence. In Dar es Salaam they used to build nests in my bathroom louvres and I paid little attention to them. Since moving to Tudor, Mombasa, I

have been compelled to take much more notice of them as they try to live on my verandah and sometimes in my lounge, almost as members of the family. I have now come to the conclusion that they are absolutely mad (which fits in well with the rest of my family members), as well as fascinating.

When we first moved in, they invaded the lounge, maybe because the flat had been empty for a year or so and they saw it as a whole new stamping ground. They spent hours and hours bringing their nesting materials onto the curtain rail where it would drift gently down behind the TV. This never seemed to faze them and at the end of each day there would be an empty curtain rail and a pile of grass on the floor. They have also tried to build in our *Gloriosa* and *Petria*, with varying degrees of success. Nests cover the whole range of building techniques, from stable and moderately stable down to the very flimsy and it never seems clear which birds actually own the nest. They never

manage more than one nest despite the large number of birds.

It seems that they spend all the daylight hours flying backwards and forwards between the various trees feeding and only look for roosting places in a big panic once the light starts to fade. At this time, the whole flock goes absolutely mad, dashing around the verandah, climbing into the nest (if there is one, or on the bare trellis if there is not), often one bird piled upon another. Much fighting and flighting goes on, so much that sometimes the nest falls from its precarious perch, fortunately so far without loss of life. — *Marlene Reid, P O Box 80429, Mombasa*

Chawia Forest in millennial crisis

Chawia is the third biggest fragment of the small and isolated forests which together compose the biodiversity hot spot known as the Taita Hills. The hills are located in south-east of Kenya, 25 km west of Voi town in Taita Taveta District. These are the northern-most representatives of the diverse and highly threatened Eastern Arc mountain forests of Kenya and Tanzania. Because these forests collectively cover such a tiny area (just a few hundred hectares), every one is extremely valuable.

Chawia occupies an area of about 50 ha. Even more than the other fragments, it is an island in an ocean of human settlements, plantations and livestock-rearing activity. This creates a sharp conflict between immediate human needs and the conservation of this fragment.

Among the critically-endangered endemics are three beautiful, multi-coloured aviators, the Taita Thrush *Turdus (olivaceus) belleri*, Taita Apalis *Apalis (thoracica) fuscicularis* and Taita White-eye *Zosterops (poliogaster) silvanus*. The pressure that they have to bear comes from grazing, firewood collection and indiscriminate, small-scale loggers who use hand-operated but quite powerful wood-saws.

All the above has been well highlighted and warned upon by different organisations and researchers. What merits mention is a recent public baraza held in October 1999 by the local District Officer and District Forestry Officer, with many other stakeholders but sadly excluding the endemics. It was decided to form a local community-based committee of elders who will as-

sist the forest guard in protecting and conserving Chawia.

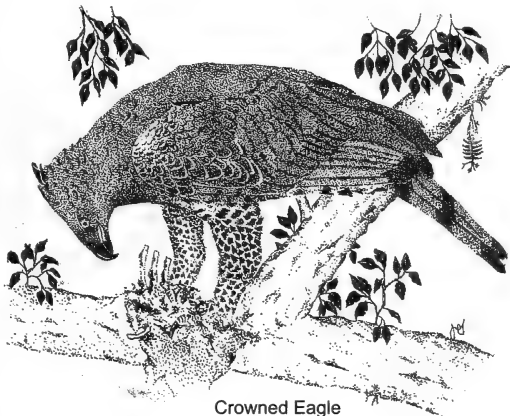
A good idea? But it was also decided that the local people be allowed to collect dead logs — only — from the forest floor. Anybody, even a layman like me, could predict the impact of this on the forest itself and the magnitude of disturbance to the forest-dependent birds, not mentioning the trampling of rare plants and insects. Furthermore the Forest Guard was instructed before the meeting not to harass that class of firewood collectors. In effect the Forest Guard was stripped of his only powers, becoming a toothless watch-dog who could only stand to one side and witness the destruction. In short, this is a death knell for Chawia Forest fragment, and who knows maybe even the other fragments.

Nowadays nobody fears carrying a panga or saw. Women have now formed groups, under banners of church activity of course, and on a daily basis come out of the forest with very heavy bundles of firewood. This is mostly indigenuous and not dry and rotting but wet and bleeding from fresh cuts. A good days harvest comprises many cubic metres. You are welcome for a Saturday afternoon spectacle if you do not believe me!

There is a complete upset of the socio-economic life style of the 'other' forest dependents, with the birds obviously panicked and not feeding but fighting off stress. In a 20 square metre

area there will probably be three paths made by firewood collectors or timber loggers. It is a common phenomenon to meet with the local 'buffalo' (cattle!) patiently grazing on your research transects deep in the forest.

This is how it looks from the ground. How long it will take for us to lose biodiversity in the Taita Hills (see



Crowned Eagle

previous *Kenya Birds*)? Very little time indeed at this rate. Someone somewhere should sit up and listen if at all our community believes in the word posterity.

Both stake-holders in the Chawia saga have a strong case to present: people, with their cultural and socio-economic activities and their livestock on the one hand, and the endemic plants, insects, birds and other forest-dependent species on the other. With unsustainable use at this level, neither side is going to benefit. This needs a strong and well-calculated management effort by the protector of this precious scrap of forest, Kenya's Forest Department. — Bernard Amakobe, Ornithology Department, P O Box 40658, Nairobi, Kenya.

Grey-crested Helmet-shrikes: indications of breeding at Lake Oloidien, Naivasha

Grey-crested Helmet-shrikes have not been recorded nesting in the Naivasha area since May 1884 (Lewis & Pomeroy 1989). On 21 September 1999 at about 11:30 h I saw a flock of fifteen of this species together at Mundui Estate, north-west of Lake Oloidien. Eight

of them flew towards the south-west. Among the

remaining seven, one bird started flapping its wings and apparently soliciting copulation. In no time, she mated with another, and repeated the performance three times before the group

moved out of sight I was well able to see all that they were doing as I was not more than 10 m from the birds, and using a pair of Tasco 7 x 9–15 x 35 zoom binoculars.

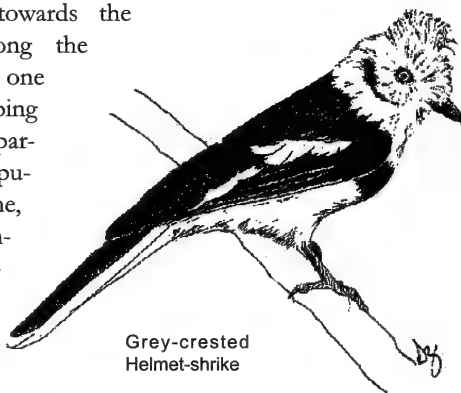
On 3 October, I found the birds again at the same place, and heard a call with which I was not familiar. This appeared to be coming from this flock, in

which I noted three members with a different plumage. These birds had dirty-white underparts and brownish upper parts, with black visible in the background, a dark iris, dark legs and feet. These I took to be immatures, and

in support of this, I was able to observe that they were being communally fed by several birds in full adult plumage. It would appear that these immature birds were about two weeks out of the nest. It is a great pity that we were not able to

find their nesting site to complete the finding, but this is a firm project for the next breeding season.

This appears to be a firm record of breeding by this globally threatened species, believed not to have been seen in this area for several decades. — *Abdi Anti, South Lake Bird Watchers' Group, c/o P O Box 61, Sulmac, Kenya.*



Grey-crested
Helmet-shrike

Grey-olive Greenbul in Nairobi Arboretum

After shifting its constant ringing efforts from Wasaa forest in Langata, the Nairobi Ringing Group (NRG) started work at the Nairobi Arboretum on 20 July 1998. On 16–17 October 1999 we had our fifth session of ringing at the

site. Eight NRG members attended this particular session with two major objectives: (1) To have our new members get practical first hand experience of ringing (setting nets, extracting birds, processing and data recording); (2) to colour band whatever we netted.

We set seven nets in four clusters, two near the river and two near the main entrance. As we retreated back to our camp no one knew how exciting the following day would be. We indulged in lengthy discussions and jokes as we prepared our supper. By ten o'clock every thing was set and it was time to retire.

The Nairobi Arboretum contains a mixture of indigenous and exotic trees and shrubs drawn from varying ecosystems. This diversity of flora is reflected in the diversity of birds — the site is remarkably rich considering its small size. Around the net lines the dominant plants included *Teclea trichocarpa*, *T. simplicifolia*, *T. viridis*, *Phytolacca dioica*, *Albizia grandibracteata* and *Croton megalocarpus*. During our visit the site was dry.

The following day, nets were opened at 06:00 h. Our first 'net-round' rewarded us with three Cabanis's Greenbuls. However, the second round was received with a lot of excitement by the entire group. Four birds had been brought in from this round, a Grey-backed Camaroptera and three greenbuls. They were later carefully identified as Grey-olive Greenbuls *Phyllastrephus cerviniventris*. These were lifers for the all the ringers present that day! Two of the greenbuls were re-traps that had originally been caught on 21 August 1999, during the third of the NRG ringing sessions at the arboretum. They had initially been mis-identified as

Slender-billed Greenbuls — the retrap gave a chance to rectify this.

All the greenbuls had similar features. As the name suggests, the general body colour was greyish-olive. Other main features included the reddish-brown tail, pinkish feet, yellowish-orange eyes, pale brownish beak and grey throat. With that good combination we readily distinguished these birds from the other greenbuls. Just in case, this time we took some photographs of the birds after processing.

The three greenbuls were caught in the nets near the river. The same day, one of the members observed a small group of the same species foraging low on the riverbanks.

According to 'Birds of Africa' and the 'Bird Atlas of Kenya', Grey-olive Greenbul is recorded from scattered localities ranging from Meru, Tharaka, Thika, Lolterish, Mzima Springs and Kitovu to Bura. Zimmerman *et al.* record it as local in Thika and Kiambu districts, near Bura (Taita district), and in Tanzanian border areas. This is the first record for the Nairobi Arboretum (atlas square 75B) though the species is known from Nairobi National Park.

We thank the Kenya Museum Society for their continued support of the Nairobi Ringing Group. — *Nicodemus Nalinya, Ornithology Department, P O Box 40658, Nairobi, Kenya*

Nesting along Nairobi streets

Have you ever tried to bird watch in the city centre? Well, if not you should! I would like to share my delight in birds nesting along streets that are better known for muggers than birdlife.

As we have spread over the world, covering it with buildings, birds have had to adapt to our changes. Many have fallen back before our advance, seeking new places to live. Others have begun to live with us, finding food and shelter in the city streets and buildings. Many birds go to towns or cities when conditions are hard. Pied Crows and Hadada

Ibises though have become permanent city dwellers.

In May 1999 there was a Hadada Ibis nesting on an acacia tree by Baden-Powell House behind County Hall. This pair was joined by another in February 2000. A Pied Crow nests on the Kenya Police headquarters communications aerial.

The tree in which the Hadada Ibises have successfully nested is intact, but who knows what tomorrow will bring? Has anyone else seen one of these birds nesting on Nairobi streets? — *Peter Kamau Mwangi, P O Box 41469, Nairobi*

Over-summering Northern Pintails at Lake Solai

During the first ever waterbird census conducted at Lake Solai on 12 July 1999, we encountered a pair of Northern Pintails at the lake. In Kenya, the Northern Pintail winters mainly from November to April on ponds, freshwater and alkaline lakes in the Rift Valley and the western and central highlands. In the Palaearctic, the species prefers freshwater marshes, small lakes and rivers, ideally with dense vegetation cover, in open country and also coastal lagoons of brackish waters. It is an occasional visitor to south-east Kenya, including the Tsavo region and coastal estuaries. Previously, apparently over-summering single birds have occurred between May and July at Lake Naivasha, Nairobi and Limuru.

Lake Solai is a seasonal marsh located 48 km north of Nakuru town and about 15 km south of Lake Baringo. It covers an area of about 6.5 km² at an altitude of 1500 m. On a clear morning,

at about 08:00 h, the Northern Pintails were spotted at a distance of about 120 m from the shore, half a kilometre from the northern end of the lake. Initially only the pale, greyish female had been spotted causing great confusion as to the bird's identification. Only about a minute later did the male appear from behind some sedges. Its clear vertical white stripe descending behind the ear-coverts along its long neck could be seen from far. With the help of a 20x telescope, we took turns to confirm our observation. The pair was about 10 m from a group of four White-faced Whistling Ducks. The area was rather marshy with sparse sedges covering the area between the shore and the birds. Other duck species also counted on the same one-kilometre section included Yellow-billed Duck and Red-billed Teal. — *Kariuki Ndang'ang'a, Titus Imboma and Nicodemus Nalinya, Ornithology Department, P O Box 40658, Nairobi, Kenya.*

Red-chested Cuckoo at Ndara Ranch, Voi

In January 1997 I sent in a record of a Red-chested Cuckoo *Cuculus solitarius* heard and seen briefly flying at Ndara Ranch, Voi (atlas square 101B). In January 1999 I happened to again be at Ndara and as soon as I arrived in the mid-afternoon I heard the unmistakable call. I was later walking around the area with two other birding friends and as we were walking out of the gate we all saw, in a nearby tree, a Red-chested

Cuckoo. A rather dark bird, but unmistakable.

I often go birding at Ndara and only on these two occasions, at exactly the same times of year, have I recorded this bird. According to the 'Bird Atlas of Kenya' it is recorded from Tsavo East (square 101B) in the wet season. This was definitely not wet season on either occasion. — *Marlene Reid, P O Box 80429, Mombasa*

Observations on foraging and breeding in the Red-throated Tit, an East African endemic

Tits belong to the Family Paridae and are small, plump mostly black and white birds. Kenya has five of the 15 tit species found in Africa. The Red-throated Tit *Parus fringillinus* has only been recorded in south-central and south-western Kenya and in northern-eastern Tanzania. Although it is locally common, it is listed as 'near-threatened' in Birdlife International's world checklist of threatened birds.

Little is known about the foraging behaviour and breeding biology of the Red-throated Tit. This article describes and discusses a few observations made on Game Ranching Limited land near Athi River and suggests conservation priorities.

Foraging behaviour

Like most tits, the Red-throated Tit is an extremely active arboreal bird, particularly when feeding. The bird's acrobatic abilities are sometimes seen as it hangs from a branch with one foot or

holds on upside down whilst gleaning insects from leaves, twigs, bark or crevices. Its sharply hooked claws enable it to cling to smooth bark and the powerful conical beak (well known to those who have extracted them from mist nets!) enables it to extract insect larvae from holes that many birds cannot reach.

A closer observation of most dead acacia twigs and branches reveals numerous round holes in or below the peeling bark. These holes are made by long-horned beetles (Family: Cerambycidae) which lay their eggs in old or decaying wood. Red-throated Tits are often seen pecking at acacia twigs and branches. Are long-horned beetle larvae an important part of their diet? In the Athi River area, Red-throated Tits commonly forage in fever trees *Acacia xanthophloea* and adjoining thickets of whistling thorn *Acacia drepanolobium*. However, unlike many of the warblers that catch fast-moving in-

sects among the live branches and leaves of the canopy, the tits move throughout the tree between dead branches and twigs, prising insects or grubs from holes and crevices. They also forage between and under lichens found on acacia trees, and peck open the leathery 'pseudo-galls' (or swollen thorn bases) of whistling thorn trees.

Tits take about a minute to peck open the 'pseudo-galls' with their powerful beak, and seem unaffected by the swarming cocktail ants (*Crematogaster* sp.), although they frequently change position on the branch. The tits do not eat the adult ants, possibly because of the bad tasting volatile formic acid the ants produce when disturbed, but extract the white larvae from the galls. Tit predation of ant larvae from whistling thorn galls appears significant since in most trees there are dead galls with holes clearly made by Red-throated Tits. Natural death and fire would account for the remainder of the dead galls in whistling thorn trees. The ant colonies on whistling thorn trees may represent a rich and reliable food source in an unpredictable climate for birds that can cope with the ants' defensive mechanisms. Just how important are insects on whistling thorn trees in the diet of the Red-throated Tit and are the ranges of the tit and whistling thorns similar?

When Red-throated tits are not breeding they are known to forage in mixed bird parties. The purpose of mixed foraging bird parties is not clear: it has been suggested that the birds benefit from the presence of many pairs of eyes to watch for predators such as raptors. I have noticed that Red-

throated Tits are often followed by Abyssinian Scimitarbills when foraging on the Athi-Kapiti Plains. Both birds are slow flying and should be easy prey for small raptors. However, I have not seen either of the birds warn each other of danger or react to the behaviour of other birds nearby. Why do the scimitarbills follow the tits? Scimitarbills cannot open the galls but the tits can. The scimitarbill is bigger than the tit and chases the tit away once it has opened up the gall. The birds also forage together in other acacias. Do both species benefit from this association?

Breeding biology

The breeding biology of the Red-throated Tit is poorly known and there are few breeding records. Many species of Afrotropical birds often breed in or after the rainy season when food supplies are more abundant. A bimodal rainfall pattern is common in large parts of the area frequented by the tit, the short rains falling between October and December and the long rains between March and May. On the Athi-Kapiti Plains the wettest month is November and the average annual rainfall is 485 mm. But the breeding records available for the Athi River area do not correspond to rainfall patterns and Kenyan breeding records span the months of January to September, with no more than two records for any one month. The birds therefore appear to be non-seasonal breeders. A non-seasonal breeding pattern would seem natural since rainfall (and presumably food availability) in the area is highly variable and erratic.

To understand the breeding patterns of the Red-throated Tit we not only need more breeding records but also need to know how dependent the species is on certain insect species in preparation for breeding, and how these food resources fluctuate with varying weather conditions.

The only description available for a Red-throated Tit's nest reads as follows: "a cavity behind the bark of a tree, lined with down and fibres". On the property of Game Ranching Limited, Red-throated Tits nested under the corrugated iron roof of a well-used pit latrine, in an old Lesser Striped Swallow *Hirundo abyssinica* nest. The parents regularly brought insects to the partially feathered chicks, but then pushed the chicks out of the nest for some reason. My attempts to put the chicks back into the nest failed. The concealed nature of the nests may explain the lack of nest records or descriptions.

Territoriality has only been recorded for the Southern Black Tit *Parus niger*, but Red-throated Tits also appear to be territorial since males are often seen pecking furiously at their reflection in windows and car mirrors.

Distribution in protected areas

The protected areas within the species' range include Nairobi National Park and the Masai Mara Game Reserve in Kenya and Lake Manyara, Serengeti, Arusha and Tarangire National Parks in Tanzania. If biodiversity is a conservation priority for these protected areas, then surely this species should receive special attention. The first step would

be to find out the bird's habitat and breeding requirements. Preliminary observations suggest that acacia woodlands and particularly fever tree woodlands are important. Fever tree woodlands are currently threatened throughout the tit's range since they are illegally targeted for charcoal production.

Conservation priorities

These could include the following.

1. To maintain healthy fever tree woodlands, encourage landowners and managers of protected areas to burn at least a 30 m firebreak around the woodland, beginning 20 m out from the edge. This prevents fires sweeping through the woodlands too often and limiting regeneration by saplings. A 20 m unburned strip around the woodland also allows for expansion of the woodland.
2. Encourage people to look for the bird and send breeding/nesting records to the National Museums of Kenya.
3. Protect the breeding sites from fire or other disturbances.
4. Nest boxes are readily accepted by tits. The provision of nest boxes in areas where trees or natural nest sites are lacking may encourage breeding.
5. Encourage students or scientists to monitor the population dynamics of the bird.
6. Encourage managers of protected areas to take an interest in the species' conservation.

— Wayne Vos, *The School for Field Studies*,
P O Box 47272, Nairobi

African Swallow-tailed Kites at Lake Oloidien

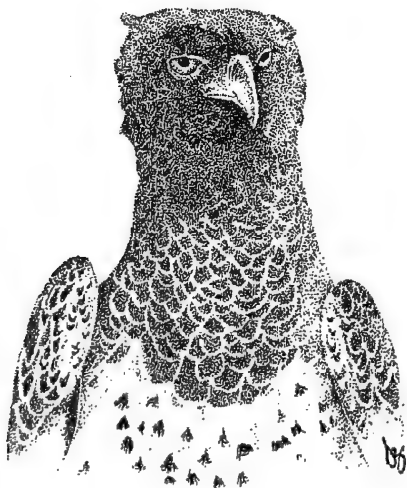
On 4 November, 1999, around 11:15 h, as I was about my usual business of following the Grey-crested Helmet-shrikes near Lake Oloidien, Naivasha., I saw what at first looked like a medium-sized tern over Mundui grassland. I was surprised to see a tern in such a place. There were three of these birds flying and sometimes hovering. On closer observation, I noticed the following. The birds' general colour was pale grey on the upper parts, with white under parts. There was some black under the wings including the 'elbow' joint area. The bill was short and strong and unmistakably hooked like that of a raptor. The tail was deeply forked. I identified the birds as African Swallow-tailed Kites. As well as being an inter-African migrant this

bird, according to 'The Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania', is found in the Longonot and Suswa areas. Mundui is only some 20 km from Longonot, and the prevailing wind is from there to Mundui.

In the course of sharing this information with Mrs Sarah Enniskillen of Mundui Estate, she informed me that she also had seen six birds meeting this description recently. Similarly Mr Don Turner tells me that he has seen them on his property in this area.

I submit this report of a most interesting and not very common bird for the interest of other local bird watchers.

— *Abdi Anti, South Lake Birdwatchers Group, P O Box 61, Sulmac, Kenya.*



Martial Eagle

Kestrel research: Request for information

George Amutete from the Ornithology Department and Anthony Van Zyl from the Transvaal Museum, South Africa have received funding from a Leslie Brown memorial award. This is intended to support a study of Common Kestrel breeding biology, as a follow-up to Anthony's earlier study of kestrel time-energy budgets in relation to latitude. Unfortunately, the focal kestrel pairs at Baringo do not seem to have nested for some time now. Amutete would be pleased to hear, via the Ornithology Department, of any other sites where these birds could be breeding.

Ornithological exploration in the northern forests of Kenya

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The forests in the northern part of Kenya are wild places. We knew this of course, but when we started our survey things went worse than in our worst nightmares... First, a road accident in the Karissia Hills, near Maralal. Luckily, no major injuries, but our Land Rover was turned into a smashed (and empty) sardine tin. Then the El Niño rains that persecuted us at Kulal, in November 1997, and again at Karissia, in April 1998. But bad luck can't last forever. After this unpleasant start things have gone much better. The survey is now in its fourth year, and our field notebooks are full of data. This article summarises the results of the field work we carried out from November 1998 to November 1999.

Mount Kulal, the forest in the desert

Mt Kulal, on the south-east of Lake Turkana, lies in the middle of a desert. But on top of the 2,300 m high mountain there is enough moisture to support an extensive forest. We had already visited Mt Kulal in 1997 (see *Kenya Birds*, vol. 7), but could not reach the northern section of the forest. This is separated from the southern section by a steep cliff, the remains of the crater of

an ancient volcano. There is only one way to get there: on foot. So on 22 October 1998 we left from the village of Loyangalani with a family of overloaded donkeys and four Turkana and Samburu guides. In two days of really hot walking we reached Toora, on the top of the mountain, where we camped for a few days. The forest was very dry at that time, and many bird species, including non-forest ones such as African Grey Flycatcher, were crowded among the trees looking for fruit and insects. The endemic form of white-eye, *Zosterops (poliogaster) kulalensis*, was incredibly abundant, and we often saw flocks of tens or more at a time. One highlight of our stay was spotting a couple of Abyssinian Black Wheatears. These are the nominate Ethiopian subspecies, not the race *lugubris* that lives in the Kenyan highlands. This confirms that Mt Kulal, placed as it is midway between Kenya and Ethiopia, could function as a sort of ornithological bridge between the two countries.

On our way back to Loyangalani we camped for one night at a place called Soitolowark, where we were greeted by a flourishing population of scorpions and carpet vipers. Apart from this, the place was also home to several species

of raptors, including Black-shouldered Kite, African Swallow-tailed Kite, Shikra, Steppe Eagle, Lanner, Eastern Pale Chanting Goshawk (one pair mating), Red-necked and Pygmy Falcons, Common Kestrel and two pairs of Fox Kestrel occupying nest sites on the edge of a steep lava rock face.

Njiru, the sacred mountain

The Samburu people know where God lives: on top of Mt Njiru, at 2700 m altitude. We climbed the mountain from several directions before finding the easiest access, a path starting from the village of Tum at 1400 m and winding up to the top. It was too narrow and steep for donkeys to pass, so we had to carry all our luggage (300 kg...) on our backs, with the help of ten Samburu porters. We camped on the edge of a very big glade, called Surkule, where a small stream runs and the cattle of several families of pastoralists graze all year round. Njiru is quite different from most other forests of North Kenya in that many people live there. Several large glades have been opened up and are occupied by groups of manyattas. Cattle and goats graze almost everywhere, even in the dense forest, where they feed on the leaves of various trees and shrubs. The effects are noticeable. Large tracts of forests look very degraded, with only large trees surviving, while saplings and shrubs have often been completely removed. Fires also seem common, as we witnessed ourselves. Birds seemed to be negatively affected by the lack of undergrowth and middle-storey vegetation, as our pre-

liminary censuses showed. One has to ask how long the forests will survive if these trends continue.

A hard climb up the Ndoto Hills

The road that reaches the small village of Nkurnit, at the foot of the Ndoto Hills, is quite rough. But the walk from there up to the top of the mountain, at 2500 m, is much worse. It took us two days on 24 and 25 March 1999 to climb it, finding our way through the dense vegetation of the forest along a path that appeared to be used much more often by buffaloes than people. The Ndotos are too steep for cattle and goats to climb and human presence is very limited. As a result the forest is looks pristine and beautiful. As one walks one encounters *Encephalarctos tegulaneus*, an odd-looking tree that looks vaguely like a big palm. It is actually a member of the cycads, a group of plants that has been around for over 200 million years and can really be considered living fossils. Clearly, a detailed survey of the birds of the Ndotos would be difficult but very worthwhile, as it might yield interesting insights on the effects that human activities can have upon forest habitats. In the few days we spent there we were able to observe several species of forest birds that had not been previously recorded in the area. These included some quite common and widespread birds, like White-starred Robin and Cabanis's Greenbul, which gives a clear idea of how few ornithologists must have been there before us...

Marsabit, the forgotten Park

Among the protected areas of Kenya, Marsabit National Reserve is one of the least known and most rarely visited. Yet it is certainly worth a visit because it is wonderful: a large forest, well preserved and fascinating. Marsabit is a real inland island, lost in a 'sea' of desert. Clearly all the forest bird species there must have reached it by crossing a large expanse of completely unsuitable habitat. This explains why some very common and widespread species, such as White-starred Robin, are not found in the Reserve. We spent three days at Marsabit, from 26 to 28 March 1999, and carried out a preliminary survey of the area, during which we liaised with the Park Authorities and looked for suitable campsites and places where mist-netting could be carried out in the future. We camped on the shores of a lake, aptly named Paradise, which occupies an old volcano crater. There in the misty mornings one could see buffaloes and baboons coming to the water for their daily drink, and hear the awesome noises of elephants walking among the trees. One dead elephant, killed by poachers, reminded us that even in protected areas wildlife is not safe. But birds are not usually interesting to poachers, and they still seem to thrive there. We were able to find some previously unrecorded species, including African Harrier Hawk and Nyanza Swift, but new records were not numerous, suggesting that the composition of the forest avifauna is already quite well

known. The next step will be to carry out more detailed studies, including mistnetting and censuses that will produce numerical estimates of the bird populations.

...and a relaxing vacation on the Karissia Hills

We visited the Karissia Hills for the second time in October 1999. Comparing to our first visit, in 1998, when we found ourselves in a completely new habitat and pounded by the El Niño rains, this time was a sort of vacation. No need to look for paths and campsites, (almost) no nasty surprises, just birds and forest. On one night we did receive a visit from a hungry big cat (very big, a lion) in search of an easy meal. Luckily, he decided that we were not easy enough. The forest was now very dry, as it had not rained for several months, and most of the birds seemed to have concentrated in the inner and wetter part of the forest. Here they appeared to feed mostly on wild fruit. Also, many Samburu pastoralists had led their cattle into the forest, thus bringing us some little trouble. Have you ever tried catching a cow in a mistnet? We did, and can advise against it. Altogether, it was a good stay. In twenty days of field work we managed to ring over 300 birds of 45 species at five different localities, from the edge up to the deepest parts of the forests, in places where there was hardly a trace of human presence.

Records for the Bird Atlas of Kenya

Little Egret: [pres 27D] Lake Paradise, Marsabit National Reserve, 27/03/99

Black-headed Heron: [pres 38D] Bauwa, south of Maralal, 19/10/99, [pres 26D] Kurungu, 10 km N of South Horr, 17/11/97

Secretary Bird: [pres 26D] Tum, 3/11/99

Brown Snake Eagle: [pres 38D] Bauwa, 18/10/99

African Harrier Hawk: [pres 27D] Marsabit NR, 28/03/99

Great Sparrowhawk: [pres 26D] Mount Njiru, 20/03/99

Mountain Buzzard: [pres 26D] Mount Njiru, 1/11/98; [pres 39A] Ndoto Hills 24/03/99

Steppe Eagle: [pres 26B] East of Loyangalani, 30/10/98

Booted Eagle: [pres 26D] S. Horr, 2/11/98; [pres 38D] Tilia Rocks, 15/5/98

Augur Buzzard: [pres 38B] Baragoi, 15/11/97

Long-crested Eagle: [pres 26D] Mount Njiru, 4/11/98

Eurasian Hobby: [pres 26D] Kurungu, 15 km N of South Horr, 16/11/97

Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse: [pres 26D] Tum, 22/3/99

Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon: [pres 38D] Loroki forest, several sightings, October 1999

Great Spotted Cuckoo: [pres 26D] Kurungu, 10 km N of South Horr, 18/11/97

Eurasian Cuckoo: [pres 26D] Mount Njiru, 4/11/98

African Emerald Cuckoo: [pres 26D] Mount Njiru, 4/11/98

Spotted Eagle-owl: [post pres 26D] Tum, 3/11/98

Verreaux's Eagle-owl: [pres 26D] Tum, 5/11/98

Pearl-spotted Owl: [pres 26D] Tum, 18/3/99

Star-spotted Nightjar: [pres 26B], Soitolararak, East of Loyangalani, 29/10/98

Nyanza Swift: [pres 27D], Marsabit, 27/03/99; [pres 38D] Loroki forest, several sightings, May 98 and October 99

Alpine Swift: [pres 26D] Mount Njiru, 19/03/99

Narina Trogon: [pres 26D] several sightings, October 98 and March

99; [pres 39A] Ndoto Hills, 25/3/99

Eurasian Bee-eater: [pres 38D] Loroki forest, several sightings, October 99

Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater: [post pres 26D], Mount Njiru, several sightings, March 99; [pres 39A] Ndoto Hills, 24/03/99

Eurasian Roller: [pres 38D] Bauwa, 23/10/99

Moustached Green Tinkerbird: [pres 39A] Ndoto Hills, 25/03/99

Lesser Honeyguide: [post pres 38D] Loroki forest, 21/10/99

Eastern Honeybird: [pres 38D] Loroki forest, 10/5/98

Masked Lark: [pres 26B] Loyangalani, 30/10/98

African Pied Wagtail: [pres 26D] Mount Njiru, 19/03/99

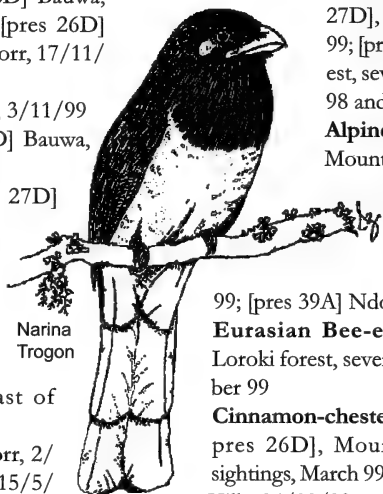
Grey Wagtail: [pres 39A] Ndoto Hills, 25/03/99; [pres 38D] Loroki forest, 14/10/99

Golden Pipit: [pres 26D] 25 km north of South Horr, 12/10/98

Tree Pipit: [pres 26D] Mount Njiru, 1/11/98

Yellow-whiskered Greenbul: [post pres 39A] Ndoto Hills, 25/03/99

Cabanis's Greenbul: [pres 39A] Ndoto Hills, 25/03/99



Narina
Trogon

Eastern Nicator: [post pres 38D] Loroki forest, 6/05/98

African Hill Babbler: [pres 39A] Ndoto Hills, 25/03/99

White-starred Forest Robin: [pres 39A] Ndoto Hills, 24/03/99

Red-capped Robin Chat: [pres 38D] Loroki forest, 18/10/99

Rüppell's Robin-chat: [post pres 27D] Marsabit, 27/03/99

Abyssinian Ground Thrush: [pres 27D] Marsabit, 27/03/99

Spotted Flycatcher: [post pres 38D] Loroki forest, 18/10/99

Dusky Flycatcher: [pres 39A] Ndoto Hills, 24/03/99

Willow Warbler: [pres 27D] Marsabit, 27/03/99; [pres 39A] Ndoto Hills, 24/03/99

Brown Woodland Warbler: [pres 39A] Ndoto Hills, 24/03/99

Cinnamon Bracken Warbler: [pres 39A] Ndoto Hills, 24/03/99

Tiny Cisticola: [pres 26D] Tum, 7/11/98

Boran Cisticola: [post pres 27D] 27/03/99

Tawny-flanked Prinia: [pres 39A] Nkurnit, 23/03/99

Grey Apalis: [post pres 39A] Ndoto Hills 24/03/99

Red-tailed Shrike: [pres 38D] Loroki forest, 24/10/99

Common Fiscal: [pres 26D] Mount Njiru, 19/03/99

Brown-crowned Tchagra: [pres 26D] Mount Njiru, 19/03/99

Grey-headed Bush Shrike: [pres 38D] Loroki forest, 15/10/99

Tropical Boubou: [pres 39A] Ndoto Hills, 24/03/99

Sharpe's Starling: [pres 26D] Mount Njiru, 4/11/98; [pres 39A] Ndoto Hills, 25/03/99

Collared Sunbird: [post pres 39A] Ndoto Hills, 25/03/99

Eastern Double-Collared Sunbird: [post pres 39A] Ndoto Hills, 24/03/99

Tacazze Sunbird: [pres 38D] Poro, 20 km N of Maralal, 31/10/99

Malachite Sunbird: [pres 38D] Loroki Forest, 11/11/99

Somali Sparrow: [pres 38D] Maralal, 14/11/97

Black-billed Weaver: [post pres 38D] Loroki forest, several sightings, October 99

Yellow-bellied Waxbill: [post pres 39A] Ndoto Hills, 24/03/99

Common Waxbill: [pres 38D] Poro, 20 km N of Maralal, 16/10/99

Crimson-rumped Waxbill: [pres 38D] Maralal, 14/11/97

Black-and white Mannikin: [post pres 38D] Bauwa, 20 km S of Maralal, 4/05/99

Yellow-crowned Canary: [pres 38D] Poro, 20 km N of Maralal 30/10/99

African Citril: [pres 38D] Poro, 31/10/99

Streaky Seedeater: [pres 39A] Ndoto Hills, 24/03/99

Breeding records

Eastern Pale Chanting Goshawk: one pair mating, Soitolowarak [26B], 22/10/98

Mountain Buzzard: one pair on the nest on top of a *Cassipourea malosana* in dense forest, Mt Kulal [26B], 16/12/97

Fox Kestrel: two pairs occupying nest sites, but presence of eggs or juveniles not confirmed, on a lavic rock face, Soitolowarak, east of Loyangalani [26B], 22/10/98

Olive Pigeon: one individual carrying nest material, Loroki forest [38D], 15/10/99

Hartlaub's Turaco: one dependent young, Loroki forest [38D], 21/10/99

White-browed Coucal: one nest with 2 eggs in a shrub, Kurungu, 10 km N of South Horr [26D], 19/11/97

Speckled Mousebird: dependent juveniles fed by adults, Loroki forest [38D], 25/10/99

White-headed Woodhoopoe: a pair with one helper feeding young in a hole in a *Podocarpus* tree, Loroki Forest [38D], 20/04/98; de-

pendent young out of nest, Loroki Forest, 9/05/98

Lesser Honeyguide: one individual flies repeatedly around a nest of African Dusky Flycatcher, Loroki forest [38D], 21/10/99

Rock Martin: one active nest with one egg, under the eaves of the roof of a house, Gatab, Mount Kulal [26B], 21/11/97

Yellow-whiskered Greenbul: depending young out of the nest, Loroki forest [38D], 19/10/99

Mountain Greenbul: three pairs in courting behaviour, Loroki forest, 14-17/10/99

Northern Brownbul: several individuals carrying nest material, Kurungu, 10 km N of South Horr [26D], 19/11/97

White-starred Robin: one dependent young out of nest, Mount Kulal [26B], 26/10/98

Olive Thrush: several individuals seen carrying nest material, Mount Kulal [26B], 29-31/03/99; depending young out of the nest, Loroki forest [38D], 21-25/10/99

African Dusky Flycatcher: one nest under construction on a *Podocarpus* in deep forest, at about 16 m of height among epiphytes, Loroki forest [38D], 21/10/99

Mountain Yellow Warbler: one individual carrying nest material, Loroki forest [38D], 15/10/99

Grey Apalis: one nest under construction on top of a *Podocarpus* tree, Loroki forest [38D], 15/10/99

Waller's Starling: one individual carrying nest material, Loroki forest [38D], 15/10/99

Eastern Double-collared Sunbird: one male

entering a nest under construction in a glade, Mount Kulal [26B], 27/10/98; another nest under construction, same locality, 28/10/98; one dependent young out of the nest, Loroki forest [38D], 15/10/99

Bronze Sunbird: one active nest on a *Podocarpus* tree in forest edge, Loroki forest [38D], 17/10/99

Golden-winged Sunbird: one individual carrying nest material, in forest edge habitat, Loroki forest [38D], 17/10/99

Amethyst Sunbird: one nest with one egg on a *Juniperus procera* tree in the village of Gatab, Mount Kulal [26B], 24/11/97; one female building nest in forest edge, Mount Kulal, 12/12/97

Baglaffeht Weaver: several active nests, Gatab, Mount Kulal [26B], November-December 97; one nest under construction in a glade, Loroki forest [38D], 24/10/99

Black-billed Weaver: two nests under construction on low trees growing in glades in dense forest, Loroki forest [38D], 24/10/99

Brown-capped Weaver: one pair building nest, Loroki forest [38D], 10/05/98; another nest under construction, 12/05/98

Yellow-spotted Petronia: one nest with young in a tree hole, Kurungu, 10 km N of South Horr [26D], 19/11/97; another nest in a tree hole, Gatab, mount Kulal [26B], 30/11/97

Purple Grenadier: one nest with one egg, in the village of Gatab, Mt Kulal [26B], 29/11/97

Waterbird counts in Kenya, July 1999 and January 2000

Oliver Nasirwa and Alfred Owino

Ornithology Department, P O Box 40658, Nairobi

In July/August 1999 and January/February 2000, a total of 177 volunteers counted waterbirds in Kenyan wetlands as part of the African Waterbird Census (AfWC). The coverage for July/August 1999 and January/February 2000 included several new sites. A full report is available from the Ornithology Department and a summary has been circulated to all participants. This is a brief overview of the results.

In July 1999, ten sites were counted: Lake Nakuru (and the two sewage treatment works), Lakes Solai and Ol'Bolossat, the five upper Tana River dams (Kamburu, Kindaruma, Gitaru, Kiambere and Masinga) and Mwea Irrigation Scheme, which was being counted for the first time. The results are summarised in the tables below. At Lake Nakuru, about 14,500 waterbirds were counted at the main lake and 4,600 at the two sewage treatment works. Lakes Solai and Ol'Bolossat held approximately 8,500 and 13,000 waterbirds respectively. Of the five upper Tana River dams, Masinga Reservoir held the highest number of waterbirds, over 8,200. A record of over 10,000 waterbirds at Mwea Irrigation Scheme was impressive for this new site. Compared with the previous count in January 1999, all the sites had low water levels. Far fewer flamingos were recorded at Lake Nakuru than during any recent count. Waterbird numbers at

Lake Ol'Bolossat and the five upper Tana River dams were lower than in 1999.

In January 2000, 36 sites were covered. Lakes Ol'Bolossat and Turkana and the upper Tana River dams were not counted during this session, but three wetlands at the Kenya coast, Lakes Jilore and Bartum and Kilifi Creek, were counted for the first time. A small section on the northern side of Lake Baringo was also counted. Sites within the Rift Valley, including the Kinangop dams, held over 1,400,000 waterbirds of 86 species. Wetlands covered within Nairobi and central Kenya held over 27,300 waterbirds of 69 species. The eight wetland sites at the Kenya coast, most of them inland, held a combined total of over 22,000 waterbirds of 80 species. The four sites around Lake Victoria held over 4,600 waterbirds of 51 different species. Except at Dandora and Kenyatta University sewage works, the water levels at all sites covered in January 2000 were lower than in January 1999. Open mud flats characterised the shores of the Rift Valley lakes and coastal sites.

Flamingos in the Rift Valley lakes totalled over 1.3 million, slightly higher than the 1.2 million in January 1999. Lake Bogoria once again had the highest number of flamingos (nearly 690,000), though this was less than in the previous year. Lake Elmenteita

(over 590,000) and Magadi (over 21,000) ranked second and third respectively in flamingo numbers. Flamingos at Lake Nakuru, although still unusually few, increased considerably in January 2000 compared with July 1999. Dandora Oxidation Ponds had more waterbirds (especially ducks) compared with January 1999. Sabaki River Mouth and Nyamware Rice Field had the highest numbers of waterbirds among wetlands covered at the Kenya coast and Lake Victoria wetlands respectively.

Some interesting records from the counts overall were (July/August 1999) 12 Lesser Moorhen at Lake Ol'Bolessat and 31 Maccoa Duck at Mwea Irrigation Scheme, and (January 2000) two Great Crested Grebes and 13 Maccoa Ducks at Elmenteita, 77 Little Ringed Plovers at Lake Nakuru, three African Darters at Hillcrest Dam, a Pacific

Golden Plover at Sabaki River Mouth, 341 White-backed Duck at Lake Chem Chem and 57 African Darter at Lake Bartum.

Acknowledgements: Once again the waterbird count organisers (the Department of Ornithology, NMK) are grateful to the volunteers who have over the years been such enthusiastic participants. We thank all those who generously provided vehicles and boats; Elsamere Field Studies Centre for counters' accommodation; Delamere's Camp for permission to count at Lake Elmenteita; the Tropical Biology Association for the loan of binoculars; and the many others who assisted in various ways. Financial support for the 1998/1999 counts came from the Ramsar Bureau's Wetland Conservation Fund and the KWS-Netherlands Wetlands Programme. The waterbird counts are a collaborative effort between the Department of Ornithology (National Museums of Kenya), Nature Kenya and the Kenya Wildlife Service.

Summary results: July 1999 and January 2000 waterbird counts

(a) Rift Valley lakes and dams

Wetland	Date	No. birds	No. species
Lake Magadi	30.01.00	25,208	29
Lake Naivasha	23.01.00	12,862	74
Lake Oloidien	22.01.00	6,088	44
Lake Sonachi	22.01.00	3,079	14
Lake Elmenteita	22.01.00	595,901	53
Lake Nakuru	09.01.00	35,253	55
	11.07.99	14,472	56
Nakuru Sewage Treatment Works	09.01.00	8,927	40
	11.07.99	4,642	26
Lake Solai	09.01.00	8,692	46
Lake Bogoria	08.01.00	693,242	31
Lake Baringo	15.01.00	156	38
	12.07.99	8,486	51
Kinangop dams	13.01.00	592	32
Lake Ol'Bolessat	27.07.99	13,058	60

(b) Wetlands around Nairobi

Wetland	Date	No. birds	No. species
Dandora Oxidation Ponds	12.01.00	22,452	41
Fourteen Falls	16.01.00	44	16
Githumbwini Dam	16.01.00	145	30
Hillcrest Dam	19.01.00	42	10
Karen Country Club Pond	19.01.00	23	9
Kayole Sewage Ponds	12.01.00	75	12
Kenyatta University Sewage Works	26.01.00	547	24
Lake View Residence Pond	08.02.00	1,874	12
Langata Rd and AHV Church	19.01.00	57	14
Limuru Sewage Ponds	05.01.00	89	11
Manguo Floodplain	05.01.00	572	31
Nairobi National Park	19.01.00	626	37
Sukari Ranch Dam	26.01.00	800	39

(c) Kenya coast

Wetland	Date	No. birds	No. species
Arabuko-Sokoke Swamp	29.01.00	763	24
Kilifi Creek	20.02.00	589	22
Lake Bartum (Goshi)	29.01.00	368	20
Lake Chem Chem	30.01.00	3,389	35
Lake Jilore	30.01.00	1,092	38
Malindi Harbour	29.01.00	969	24
Mida Creek	29.01.00	6,767	27
Sabaki River Mouth	30.01.00	8,247	43

(d) Lake Victoria wetlands

Wetland	Date	No. birds	No. species
Dunga Beach	29.01.00	313	18
Hippo Point	29.01.00	157	14
Nyamware Rice Field	29.01.00	2,913	25
Sondu-Miriu River Mouth	29.01.00	1,248	37

(e) Upper Tana River dams

Wetland	Date	No. birds	No. species
Kamburu Dam	29.07.99	1,348	36
Kindaruma Dam	01.08.99	196	26
Gitaru Dam	30.07.99	82	15
Kiambere Dam	31.07.99	1,337	35
Masinga Reservoir	02.08.99	8,293	43
Mwea Irrigation Scheme	03.08.99	10,797	50

Notes for contributors

Kenya Birds welcomes contributions for possible publication. Records and nest record cards should be sent to the Records Officer, Ornithology Department, National Museums of Kenya, P O Box 40658, Nairobi (e: kbirds@africaonline.co.ke). Detailed instructions can be found on p. 44 of this issue. Not all records can be published, as space is limited, but all properly dated and located records are valuable. Records are vetted before publication and you might be asked to provide additional details. This is just to make sure that all the information in *Kenya Birds* is reliable — do not be offended if your records are queried!

Other contributions may be notes or longer articles. Articles on good birding sites ("Birding in...") are especially welcome — readers have much information to share. Most issues of *Kenya Birds* contain an article on a particular (globally or regionally) threatened species: contributions are encouraged. Shorter notes may deal with anything interesting (and ornithological) that you want to share with other readers — unusual behaviour, exceptional sightings, birding tips, conservation concerns...

Please remember that *Kenya Birds* goes to a wide, general audience. Articles should be simply and clearly written with a minimum of jargon. Highly technical articles are best published elsewhere. *Kenya Birds* uses the English bird names in the 'green' EANHNS checklist for Kenya (third edition, 1996). (The English names in Zimmerman *et al.* 'Birds of Kenya and northern Tanzania' nearly all follow this list.) Scientific names are usually only included for birds not in the checklist, or where there might otherwise be some confusion. References to the literature can be included where needed but are discouraged. Standard reference works can be cited as shown below, and omitted from the reference list. Any other references should be given in full at the end of the text, using the format shown below.

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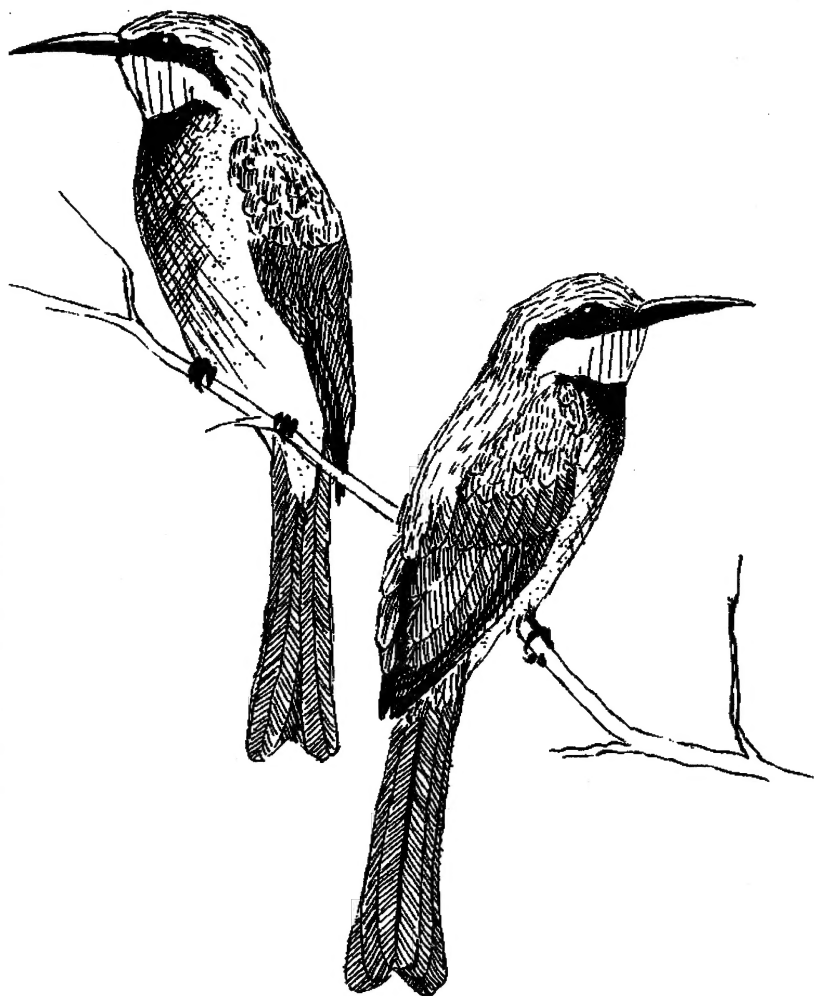
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